Summer 2011

"When Love is Born in a Cage Not of lts Own Building ": The New Woman and Fiction of Kate Chopin

Jennifer Battistoni
Governors State University

Governors State University

University Park, Illinois

"When Love is Born in a Cage Not of Its Own Building": The New Woman and Fiction of Kate Chopin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts English

by

Jennifer Battistoni

2011

Table of Contents

Title

Copyright

Acknowledgements

Abstract

An Introduction: "When Love is Born in a Cage Not of Its Own Building": The New Woman and Fiction of Kate Chopin

Detailed Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1: Where Did She Come From and How Did She Get Here?: A Brief History of the New Woman

Chapter 2: The Evolution of Literary Development and the New Woman in Literature

Chapter 3: The New Woman as seen in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Chapter 4: Are We Who They Wanted Us to Be? The Twenty-First Century New Woman

Works Cited Page

Annotated Bibliography

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my academic supervisor, Rashidah Jaami` Muhammad, Ph.D., Professor of English and Secondary Education. Dr. Muhammad has been a part of my academic endeavors since 1999. She has seen me through a Bachelor of Arts English Degree, Secondary Education Certification and a Master of Arts English Degree at Governors State University. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Muhammad for giving me the confidence to explore my research interests and the guidance to avoid getting lost in my exploration. She was an incredible mentor: sharp, cheery, perceptive, and mindful of the things that truly matter. Her vast knowledge of the subject matter and guidance has provided a solid foundation for the present thesis.

I would also like to thank the two professors who warmly accepted my request to be readers, Professor Cheryl Hague, University Lecturer of English and Secondary Education and Christopher White, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of English. Like Dr. Muhammad, Professor Hague has been an influential part of my academic studies since 1999. I appreciate her encouragement and support. Professor Hague encouraged me to delve deeper into my research, thus, resulting in a well-balanced thesis. I warmly thank Dr. White for taking time out to read my work. I am grateful for his comments throughout my thesis and encouragement to think critically about my subject.

Finally, I would like to thank my family: Mike, my husband, Bella, my daughter and Mikey, my son. Without their support, understanding and love it would have been impossible for me to complete my research and writing. My shadow and my light, Bella and Mikey, supported, encouraged and loved me at every moment, and I am indebted to them eternally. This thesis is dedicated to them.

Abstract

Battistoni, Jennifer. M.A. English, Governors State University, August 2011. "When Love is Born in a Cage Not of Its Own Building": The New Woman and Fiction of Kate Chopin. Major Professor: Rashidah Jaami` Muhammad Ph. D.

Women have struggled and fought for equality since the beginning of time. Women's movements supporting equality began to emerge in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth century. In addition to forming groups, one of the most successful ways women's voices were heard was through literature. Most often women wrote in response to their forced condition. According to Emily Toth in *The Independent Woman and "Free" Love,* "Women, no matter their personal psychological independence, still suffere[ed] from pervasive judgment by caste, i.e., their society judge[ed] them by the standards of womanhood" (650). This "womanhood" that they were judged against was their appearance and wifely and motherly qualities, regardless of their personal ambitions. Additionally, according to Toth, "economic independence [was] virtually impossible. Liberation and the choice of freedom [were], at best, partial and one dimension [was] almost invariably missing: Sex, the difference between renunciation and tragedy for the unmarried woman" (651). Women writers succeeded in writing their characters to embrace this new persona they were striving towards; she was called, the New Woman. This project explores the New Woman as developed and defined through the literature of Kate Chopin. The first chapter explores the herstory of women in the nineteenth century and the development of the New Woman. In addition to a brief history, I will define and describe nineteenth century society and the concepts of the New Woman. This chapter will show how women began moving from a domestic culture toward socio-economic independence.

The second chapter will explore the literary development during the nineteenth century and show how the New Woman was redefined in literature. The feminist philosopher Elaine

Showalter, author of *Tradition and the Female Talent*, explores the movement from pre-Civil War women in fiction to post. According to Showalter:

> Thematically and stylistically, pre-Civil War women's fiction, variously described as "literary domesticity" or the "sentimental novel," celebrates matriarchal institutions and idealizes the period of blissful bonding between mother and child. It is permeated by the artifacts, spaces, and images of nineteenth-century American domestic culture...Women's narratives were formally composed of brief sketches joined together like the pieces of a patchwork quilt; they frequently alluded to specific quilt patterns and followed quilt design conventions of repetition, variations and contrast. (38)

After the Civil War, during the nineteenth century, women began demanding change. Post-Civil War writers found themselves in a different cultural situation. The patriarchal world of women's culture began to dissolve as women demanded entrance to higher education, the professions, and the political world. The women of this generation began to assert themselves as the daughters of literary mothers as well as literary fathers. Claiming both female and male aesthetic models, they felt free to present themselves as artists and to write confidently about the art of fiction (Showalter 38). Chapter two will provide a detailed outline of the movement from "literary domesticity" to literary liberation.

The third chapter will explore the methods Kate Chopin used to include the image or characteristics of the New Woman in *The Awakening*. Chapter three will explore *The Awakening*, centering on the development of the New Woman through the characters conventional and unconventional roles. I will also focus on her objective treatment of topics such as adultery and suicide, which I believe are the result of Chopin's desire to highlight the

basic needs "of woman's right to be herself, to be individual and independent whether she wants to be weak or strong, a nest maker or a soaring bird" (Seyersted 196). I contend that in exemplifying a new literature of the female experience, Kate Chopin produced fiction that can be read and interpreted as the foundation of the New Woman movement during the nineteenth century. This New Woman was illustrated through the characters in Chopin's fiction. The New Woman literature calls for a reexamination of the female role in nineteenth century society and is a precursor to twentieth century feminist-based literature.

The forth and final chapter will conclude with examples of how Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* remains a timeless piece, which sends a very distinct message for the twenty-first century woman. It will cover themes seen throughout her literature, not simply *The Awakening*, and show how she used these themes in order to send a direct message to her readers.

Detailed Outline of "When Love is Born in a Cage Not of Its Own Building":

The New Woman and Fiction of Kate Chopin

The first chapter explores the history of women in the nineteenth century and the development of the New Woman. In addition to a brief history, I will define and describe nineteenth century society and the concepts of the New Woman. This chapter will show how women began moving from a domestic culture toward socio-economic independence.

In two centuries an agricultural nation with feudal structures was transformed into a great industrial capitalist power characterized by the economic, political and ideological hegemony of the middle classes. For middle-class women, liberation from the most arduous domestic slavery, and the acquisition of leisure, were part of an evolution that began around the beginning of the eighteenth century.

From that period onwards more and more girls attended institutions that claimed to prepare them for marriage, teaching them the rudiments of French, reading, writing, arithmetic, and more general accomplishments, in short the elements useful for a role of display. New periodicals such as *Ladies Magazine* began in 1770 testify to the existence of a female reading public regularly provided with edifying nourishment that was intended to "...confirm chastity and recommend virtue..." (Basch 3). However, many of the activities that were considered proper were virtually useless. How then was a woman to render her life worthwhile? The answer to that question was by marriage, and devotion to her husband, and her children, if she had any. In herself she was nothing. Only by relating to husband and children could she develop and fulfill her moral personality (Calder 56). While women began challenging their roles in society as early as the late-18th century, the term "New Woman" did not emerge until the late 1800s.

The term New Woman did not exist until 1894. In this year, British novelist Sarah Grand used it in reference to those who were dissatisfied with nineteenth century prescriptions of femininity. In her essay, "The New Aspects of the Woman Question," which appeared in the North American Review, Grand wrote that the New Woman is one who "has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what is wrong with the Home-is-the-Woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy" (8). However, it was novelist Maria Louise Ramé who selected the phrase and capitalized it for her rebuttal in May 1894:

> In the English language there are conspicuous at the present moment two words which designate two unmitigated bores: The Workingman and the Woman. The Workingman and the Woman, the New Woman, be it remembered, meet us at every page of literature written in the English tongue, and each is convinced that on its own especial W hangs the future of the world. (Toth 168-170)

The definition of the New Woman continued to move through the nineteenth and twentieth-century constantly being redefined.

The second chapter will explore the literary development during the nineteenth century and show how the New Woman was incorporated and defined in literature. The feminist philosopher Elaine Showalter, author of *Tradition and the Female Talent*, explores the movement from pre-Civil War women in fiction to post. According to Showalter, "Thematically and stylistically, pre-Civil War women's fiction, variously described as "literary domesticity" or the "sentimental novel," celebrates matriarchal institutions and idealizes the period of blissful bonding between mother and child. It is permeated by the artifacts, spaces, and images of nineteenth-century American domestic culture…Women's narratives were formally composed of

brief sketches joined together like the pieces of a patchwork quilt; they frequently alluded to specific quilt patterns and followed quilt design conventions of repetition, variations and contrast" (Showalter 38). After the Civil War, during the nineteenth century, women began demanding change. Post-Civil War writers found themselves in a different cultural situation. The patriarchal world of women's culture began to dissolve as women demanded entrance to higher education, the professions, and the political world. The women of this generation began to assert themselves as the daughters of literary mothers as well as literary fathers. Claiming both male and female aesthetic models, they felt free to present themselves as artists and to write confidently about the art of fiction.

Chapter three focuses primarily on Kate Chopin's New Woman as seen in her literary masterpiece, *The Awakening. The Awakening* marked a significant epoch in the evolution of an American female literary tradition. As an American woman novelist of the 1890s, Kate Chopin had inherited a rich and complex tradition, composed not only of her American female precursor but also of American transcendentalism, European realism, and *fin de siècle* feminism and aestheticism. *The Awakening* broke new thematic and stylistic grounds. Chopin went boldly beyond the work of her precursors in writing about women's longing for sexual and personal emancipation (Showalter 34). Chopin was a contributor to the New Woman movement through her literature. The New Woman was seen as the cultural and literary arm of first-wave feminist activism, with the underlying objective being the use of literature as a political tool for social change. She frequently engaged with the themes of New Woman fiction: the importance of female independence, tomboyish heroines who refuse to be feminized, women's conflict between art and love, unconventional marital arrangements, marital oppression, prostitution and congenital syphilis. *The Awakening* revolves around the key concerns of New Woman fiction

marriage, motherhood, women's desire for a separate identity and bodily autonomy and reconceptualises these through the metaphors of gestation, awakening and sensual-spiritual epiphany. It aligns itself with nineteenth century female traditions of writing, in particular the fiction of the New Woman (Beer 87). Edna's story may also be read as a parable of Chopin's literary awakening. Both the author and the heroine seem to be caught between two worlds, caught between contradictory definitions of femininity and creativity, and seeking either to synthesize them or to go beyond them to an emancipated womanhood and an emancipated fiction.

Finally, chapter four asks and attempts to answer the question: Are we who they wanted us to be? Are we, the twenty-first century woman, New in any way? The reception of *The Awakening* during Kate Chopin's lifetime was as follows. The storm of moral outrage at Kate Chopin's 'unutterable crimes against polite society' quickly overshadowed appreciation of her 'flawless art'. Though acknowledged as a 'brilliant piece of writing', this was 'not a pleasant story' nor a 'healthy' or 'wholesome' book, critics warned, condemning (it) as 'essentially vulgar', 'morbid', 'repellent', even 'nauseating' and 'gilded dirt' that left one 'sick in human nature' (Beer 88). Willa Cather, soon to embark on her own exploration of female independence in *The Song of the Lark* (1915), deplored that Chopin had 'devoted so exquisite and sensitive, well-governed a style to so trite and sordid a theme' (Beer 88). The following gives a sense of how deeply extended into the fabric of the times were public feelings against women's autonomy: "It is not a healthy book," reported the St. Louis Globe, "It leaves one sick of human nature," contended The Mirror and, finally, it was seen as an "overworked…sex fiction," described the Chicago Times-Herald (Fisher 23). Today, the perception, criticism and reception

looks and sounds like a very different story. After multiple waves of feminism and the evolution of the woman, we may be close to who it was that they wanted us to be.

Chapter 1

Where Did She Come From and How Did She Get Here:

A Brief History of the New Woman

According to Maya Angelou, In two centuries an agricultural nation with feudal structures was transformed into a great industrial capitalist power characterized by the economic, political and ideological hegemony of the middle classes. For middle-class women, liberation from the most arduous domestic slavery, and the acquisition of leisure, were part of an evolution that began around the beginning of the eighteenth century. From that period onwards, more and more young women attended institutions that claimed to prepare them for marriage, teaching them the rudiments of French, reading, writing, arithmetic, and more general accomplishments, in short the elements useful for a role of display. Despite the supposed education that girls and women received, their primary role, educated or not, was in the home. In addition to their studies centering on domesticity, literature advertised to women focused, primarily, on how to be a good, upstanding mother, sister and wife. New periodicals such as *Ladies Magazine* began in 1770, testify to the existence of a female reading public regularly provided with edifying nourishment that was intended to '…confirm chastity and recommend virtue…' (Basch 3). However, many of the activities that were considered proper, were virtually useless. How then was a woman to render her life worthwhile? Mary Wollstonecraft, eighteenth century philosopher; advocate for women's rights; and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* thought women's liberation would be the direct result of being allowed to attend school and strive towards a higher education. Wollstonecraft's objective, at first, was not looking for equality across the board, but an equal opportunity for education. Most of the forerunners for women's rights sought equal education but none thought of equal intellect. Wollstonecraft also

supported an education system that had no sexual distinctions between men and women. Her goal was a national system of public and coeducational schools. From this education, women could choose professions that suited their individual needs, not the needs of the patriarchal male.

However, the unfortunate answer to the question, how was a woman to render her life worthwhile, was by marriage and devotion to her husband and her children. It was believed and accepted that in herself she was nothing. Only by relating to husband and children could she develop and fulfill her moral personality (Calder 56). Because of the patriarchal dominance throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, which mandated that women not be granted equal and free rights, women were forced into domestic servitude. While for women domesticity was acceptable, and even preferred, there were a select few who began to feel they would, "...give up the unessential; give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me," and so the women's movement and the development of the New Woman began (Chopin "The Awakening" 28). While they felt that way, it would be years before certain women acted on those emotions.

Prior to the women's movement, the emergence of the New Woman and feminism, one of the only options for women to survive outside the parental home was through marriage. There was no viable alternative, for women, for the prospect of security outside of marriage between the parental home and possession by a husband. A reoccurring theme in nineteenth century fiction involves the worry of parents that they might be unable to give their children a proper financial send-off. The head of the family was the economic support of everyone else, and of course this increased both his power and responsibility. According to Jenni Calder, author of *Women and Marriage in Victorian England,* "It was not acceptable that children become

economically independent, though the questions of inheritance interfered here, as the eldest son's right to inherit usually meant that younger sons had to fend for themselves even when there might have been plenty to go round" (23). In order for a family to succeed in handing off their daughter in marriage, the leader of the household had to ensure he nurtured and encouraged certain acceptable traditions:

> The middle-class achieved, through a large measure of dedication and self-discipline, particularly in the part of women, a union of material and moral interests, which is reflected in a great deal of fiction, attacked by some writers…explored and exposed by others. This union operates at the heart of the middle-class family. …there are fathers who carefully nurture their sons, ostensibly providing a religious and moral education, but in fact grooming them for business, for making money and winning success. The ideal of middle-class morality, of comfortable domesticity, of patriarchal authority, was impossible without cash. (Calder 83)

The union Calder refers to was the acceptance that the female would be married off and the male would carry on the traditions of the past. The traditional behavior and ascribed gender roles of male and female are what perpetrated inequality and the submission of women during the nineteenth century.

Fathers would hand off their daughters for a nominal fee as they secured their role as wife and mother, thus carrying on the tradition of household servitude. Oftentimes, marriage came with a price. The eighteenth and nineteenth century was a period when women were seen to have no existence except in terms of their relationship to men; a period of moral contradictions, where 'official' morality had little to do with the behavior of the majority (Calder 25). Because

men assumed the role as leader, it was easy for them to keep women in the position of minority. Because of women's lack of economic rights the dowry, usually involved in societal marriages, was a literal payment from father to husband. Because of this, there were many concerned fathers who feared they might not be able to finance their daughter's marriages. In return for this the husband would usually negotiate with the father the terms of a marriage settlement, which might include specific financial provision for the wife. It was a lax parent who failed to ensure that the terms were as good as the dowry deserved. In other words, a young woman's personal financial prospects after marriage tended to be directly related to the wealth and status of her father. According to Calder, "The [father] had responsibilities, a major one being to provide the necessary cash, and he liked to see the symbolic value of his wealth solidly represented in his home…He needed money to marry off his daughters handsomely; in fact paternal responsibility was seen very much in terms of money, and ultimately it was in money that the father's authority and power lay" (83). This necessity only added to the power and control men felt they had over women, leading women to feel a sense of helplessness. Calder continues, "Because of the dowry…The vulnerability of women, therefore, stems not just from feminine weakness, but from their lack of economic status" (17). So, not only were women vulnerable because of their preconceived weaknesses at birth, they were threatened with a life of solitude if their father did not have the means to provide a substantial dowry. Author of "The Independent Woman and 'Free' Love," Emily Toth describes the effect this had on women, "Women, no matter their personal psychological independence, will suffer from pervasive judgment by caste, i.e., their society judges them by the standards of womanhood --- appearance, wifely and maternal qualities --- regardless of their own aims. Moreover, economic independence is virtually impossible. 'Liberation' and the choice of freedom are, at best, partial --- and one dimension is

almost invariably missing: Sex, the difference between renunciation and tragedy for the unmarried woman" (Toth 651-652). Aside from the obvious, one of the main problems was that most, including some women, believed that in herself she was nothing and according to Francoise Basche, author of *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel*:

> they are … from their own constitution and from the station they occupy the world … relative creatures. This established, the woman can only justify her presence on earth by dedicating herself to others; through deliberate self-effacement, duty and sacrifice she will discover the identity and *raison d'etre* of which, by herself, she is deprived. (5)

The feeling that women were nothing more than servants to men planted a deep-seeded root, which led them to believe they had no individuality or, even worse, no sense of self.

The feeling of no sense of individuality was instilled beginning at a very young age. Written by men, there were manuals advising the behavior of young ladies, which began to grow numerous as the century progressed. Calder writes, "As long as they could be persuaded to believe that marriage was their major occupation in life, and as long as there were men who could afford to buy wives, either with money or social status, ideally with both, it would be possible…to consider their destined brides as precious items of furniture, tributes to their own good taste" (181). On the one hand, young girls were brought up under severe restrictions. On the other hand, they were encouraged to look towards marriage as liberation, where they would achieve the acknowledgment of adulthood and as much freedom to control their own lives as was consonant with being female. Unfortunately, the freedom was largely illusory, for most young women exchanged the control of a father for the control of a husband. Restriction was an ill education for liberty, and most of them passed straight from childhood to the responsibilities of

matron-hood without any chance of testing their strength as young women, except in the marriage market. In response to the pressures put upon these young girls, in 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women.* In it she stated:

> I am astonished at the folly of many women, who are still reproaching their husbands for leaving them alone, for preferring this or that company to theirs, for treating them with this and the other mark of disregard or indifference; when, to speak the truth, they have themselves in a great measure to blame. Not that I would justify the men in anything wrong on their part.

Wollstonecraft blames both the men and women for their unfortunate existence and uses directness as a tool to motivate change. She, not only, places blame on the obvious perpetrators, but also includes women. She continues:

> But had you behaved to them with more respectful observance, and a more equal tenderness; studying their humours, overlooking their mistakes, submitting to their opinions in matters indifferent, passing by little instances of unevenness, caprice, or passion, giving soft answers to hasty words, complaining as seldom as possible, and making it your daily care to relieve their anxieties and prevent their wishes, to enliven the hour of dullness, and call up the ideas of felicity: had you pursued this conduct, I doubt not but you would have maintained and even increased their esteem, so far as to have secured every degree of influence that could conduce to their virtue, or your mutual satisfaction; and your house might at this day have been the abode of domestic bliss. (Chapter 5:81)

So, as long as young women adhered to the rules they could depend on marital bliss. As long as they satisfied the every need of their husband, they themselves were guaranteed happiness, but

what about their individual happiness? Whose job was it to ensure they were happy? Did their happiness come in only the security of a male suitor? Women were encouraged to accept this type of lifestyle, regardless of their own desires. Until the question, what about us, was answered, women would continue to be domestic slaves. If the young girls were so fortunate to have this type of leader in their lives to teach them, if carefully treasured, that might have saved them from a shipwreck of happiness. However, if they weren't so lucky their lives might mirror what Calder describes as the expectations of a married woman:

> The wholly explicit and idealized characterizations of marriage as the total subordination of wife to husband, in the nineteenth century, looked like this: Dependence is in itself an easy and pleasing thing: dependence upon one we love perhaps the very sweetest thing in the world. To resign oneself totally and contentedly into the hand of another; to have no longer any need of asserting one's rights or one's personality, knowing that both are as precious to that other as they were to ourselves; to cease taking thought about oneself at all, the rest safe, at ease, assured that in great things and small we shall be guided and cherished, guarded and helped, in fact thoroughly 'taken care of,' how delicious is all this. So delicious, that it seems granted to very few of us, and to fewer still as a permanent condition of being. (59)

While poetically being taken care of, being guided and not having to deal with the larger issues in life might sound ideal, in reality it was not so "delicious." So, because the majority of men and women accepted this way of life, women went from girlhood straight into wifehood, many, without questions or expectations.

Throughout the nineteenth century there were fewer men than women, so this notion of marital bliss being available to only a select few was not absurd. Wives had a duty to love their husbands, except in extraordinary circumstances, in which case they had a duty to make the best of things. And they had a duty to ensure their husbands loved them. If they were incapable or unwilling to ensure their husbands were satisfied, the threat of adultery was inevitable. Francoise Basche, author of *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel,* contends that "A middle-class wife would almost certainly be hedged in by children, by domestic responsibilities and by duty to her husband, and anything that could represent worth in her limited perspective was likely to be significant in her eyes. When the woman is denied all capacity for creation, action and authority, her contribution in the masculine world becomes the emotional and moral guidance, which are her vocations as wife and mother" (Basche 5). There were not many options or choices available to women that would grant them more in life to avoid a life of doting wives or cheating husbands. Not only might she be cheated on, but if she was not providing comfort and love she could be looked upon as unfavorable by society. One of the many problems with this way of life during the nineteenth century was that, according to Calder, "...if a wife does not make it exaggeratedly obvious that she dotes on her husband she becomes a prey to the misconceptions of other men" (57). Women were expected to dote on their husbands and maintain a happy cohesive household. If she chose otherwise, other men might become aware which could lead to a life of solitude, which in the grand scheme of things often became the preferred way of life for many women.

However, while many women feared being cheated on or left alone, in some areas it was considered acceptable, whether happy or sad within the marriage, to live parallel lives. According to Calder, in fashionable society it was considered *a la mode* for husband and wife to

lead separate lives, extra-marital affairs were accepted, and it was not regarded as necessary to invite a married couple together to the same social function. Married women were the legitimate prey of unattached young men, who thus tested their sexual prowess (19). This idea of living separate lives, having extramarital affairs and finding contentment in that lifestyle was becoming a current theme in women's fiction during the late nineteenth century. In addition to extramarital affairs becoming the status quo, serious focus on women's sexuality and pleasure was starting to take precedent. According to Emily Toth, in "The Independent Woman and 'Free' Love," "While patriarchy tends to convert woman to a sexual object, she has not been encouraged to enjoy the sexuality, which is agreed to be her fate. Indeed, she is made to suffer for and be ashamed of her sexuality, while in general not permitted to rise above the level of a nearly exclusively sexual existence" (Toth 651). While this was the current theme for many women, this feeling of shame and embarrassment was about to be rejected by those who did not choose to live in that fashion.

Because of the dissatisfaction with no sense of self, independence, and the shame in sexual expression, expectations among and for women were beginning to change. What real events may have influenced these women to move away from domesticity? Were they triumphant or did they fail? The fight for equality and economic freedom, often times, was an uphill battle because as women moved toward independence and equality, young ladies and girls were still overly influenced by society. According to Toth, the life and state of women are in general too much controlled by exterior law for it to be permitted by them to shape themselves into forms of their own creation ("Free Love" 650). The heavy influence from society over young girls and women posed many obstacles for the forerunners of women's equal rights.

While they were faced with many hurdles, it was the following attitude held by the majority that inspired them to battle on:

> The acquisition of knowledge must aim only to dispel the most glaring errors that crowd the woman's weak brain, encourage the worship of the Creator, and make her a more enlightened companion for the male. … the acquisition of wisdom must not aim at 'self-development' but 'self-renunciation' relieved by the ability to understand and help the man in his task. (Basche 5)

This narrow-minded way of thinking prompted the first feminists to concentrate their fight on the legal status of the wife. They aimed towards women's claim for financial independence, whether she was married or not, as inseparable from the demand for education, professional training, and access to various trades as their primary goal. By combining financial independence with the need for education, women elevated their needs to a higher ground.

Prior to the introduction of the New Woman, there were women pioneers who began the women's suffrage movement in the early-mid nineteenth century. Among society's most prominent female forerunners were, Susan B. Anthony, Emily Davies, Frances Buss, Dorothea Beale, Sophia Jex-Blake and Barbara Bodichon. Susan B. Anthony called for an acceptance of a transitional period between her own time of conventional marriages, in which women were subjugated to their husbands, and a new future day when marriages would be built on a model of a partnership of equals. "During this period Anthony prophesized, women would support themselves and have their own houses" (Malin 2). In this instance Anthony is referring to only a small population of women, primarily her privileged friends, but eventually her message would reach the masses. While that was the case, her thinking was radical considering the time and was the foundation for changes about to occur. Some of the first changes were: in 1847 the first

restrictions on working hours for women were put in place and in 1849 the Bedford College for Women was started. More changes continued to occur over the next few years. For example, in1857 new divorce laws were enacted; the English Woman's Journal came into existence and the Matrimonial Causes Bill was approved. One of the final changes of the nineteenth century that impacted the women's movements was in 1866 the first woman's suffrage society was started.

The influence of this first suffrage society showed that public opinion was ripe. It was galvanized by the election of the first eminent feminist to Parliament, John Stuart Mill in 1865. "All women…" wrote Mill:

> are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. What is now called nature is an eminently artificial thing, the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others. It may be asserted without scruple, that no other class of dependents have had their character so entirely distorted from its natural proportions by their relation with their masters; for, if conquered and slave races have been, in some respects, more forcibly repressed, whatever in them has not been crushed down by an iron heel has generally been let alone and if left with any liberty of development, it has developed itself according to its own laws; but in the case of women, a hot-house and stove cultivation has always been carried on of some of the capabilities of their nature, for the benefit and pleasure of their masters. (Mill qtd. in Richardson 4-5)

What this meant for women was that there was a male Member of Parliament willing to speak on their behalf. Mill would continue to fight for equal rights among men and women. One of his first successes was when he moved an amendment to change the word 'men' to 'person,' providing women with the right to vote. Although it was voted down, 73 members had voted in favor of the amendment. While it was voted down, he never gave up. As early as 1866 the society collected 1,500 votes in favor of the right of female households to vote, and it rapidly gained ground in Manchester where, in 1867, it collected 13,500 signatures. "The first public meeting was held in London in 1869. Participation in the new suffrage societies and the signing of petitions were encouraged by the first important public statement on the question, Mill's in the Commons on 20 May 1867" (Basche 14). While women, and few men, were making progress, the changes did not stop there; 1867 became an important year for women's rights.

One factor in the early mobilization of feminism was the 1832 Reform Act, through which women's exclusion from the franchise was formalized. Additionally, it allowed for property qualification franchises becoming available to lower class and working class women. According to Angelique Richardson, author of *The New Woman In Fiction and In Fact: Fin-de-Siecle Feminisms*, a petition was presented to Parliament, demanding that the franchise should include women who met the property qualification. It was rejected, and a small but conscious group of women began to campaign for female enfranchisement and emancipation; this culminated in 1866 in the presentation to the Parliament of a petition signed by 1,499 women demanding that the suffrage reform then under consideration include votes for women (Richardson 3). The fight for female enfranchisement and emancipation would not end there, but would continue throughout the years to come.

As the years moved on and the suffrage movement made headway, according to Basche, "... feminism took on a political character and its enemies were obliged to take it seriously" (14). In 1870 and 1882 the Married Women's Property Act won the vote, which gave all married women the right to their own property, extending the equitable concept of married women's separate estate, while dispensing with the need for settlements and trustees. Most accepted that the only way to end the theory and practice of women as property was to end private property itself and so they sought to extend the home and erase the boundary between the self-enclosing family unit and the wider community. People began looking at marriage and the nuclear family unit in connection with the wider community as a whole. In other words, society took into consideration the family unit and how the inner workings affected the community. Erasing the boundaries between the home and the community opened the doors for more scrutiny of people's personal lives. They began seeing marriage and the nuclear family as impediments to the development of genuinely cooperative communities. Because of the breaking down of boundaries, in 1870 women were able to have money and property in their own names, making it more difficult to regard women as property of men. According to Richardson, "While it took some time to work its way through the system, in 1918 the vote was given to women of 30 and over, and in 1928 to women of 21 and over" (4). The changes that were being made politically began to influence society on a larger scale. Women's movements were becoming more powerful and supported by more and more women, as well as men. There were ups and downs, and votes for yes and no, but those trials and tribulations only made the movements all the more powerful. The women's suffrage groups would see many changes throughout the mid and late nineteenth century.

From the 1840s on, the suffrage crusade was accompanied by several other movements that allowed women into their ranks in leadership positions, anticipating the reform interests for which many New Women of the 1890s would be known. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, formed in 1874, grew to become the largest women's group in the nineteenth century. While many may not have considered joining the more radically seen suffrage movements of the past, because this group was linked to the church, it helped more women realize their capabilities for effecting social change. The positive changes that women were experiencing were catchy. Eventually, the people of the women's suffrage movement would coin themselves the New Woman. The New Woman would become a leader for, both, women's rights and individuality.

While women began challenging their roles in society as early as the late eighteenth century, the term New Woman did not emerge until the late 1800s. In the late 1800s and throughout the early-mid 1900s, Sarah Grand, British feminist writer and author of *The Heavenly Twins*, emerged as a leading female writer. In her novel, Grand demonstrates the dangers of the moral double standard, which overlooked men's promiscuity while punishing women for the same acts. More importantly, however, Grand argues in *The Heavenly Twins* that middle-class women have the responsibility of choosing mates with whom they might produce strong, well-educated children. "Grand," according to Talia Schaffer, author of "Nothing but Foolscap and Ink: Inventing the New Woman," "believed that men and women were intrinsically different and that their public roles ought to reflect those innate character traits" (Grand 41). Grand's agenda for the New Woman, as seen in her literature, included everything from bicycling to suffrage to rational dress. While not all New Woman writers took the same position as Grand, they did agree that reform in many areas of life was necessary for women's emancipation.

The New Woman believed that the feminism of the first part of the eighteenth century was of a limited character. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the image of wife-mother was not fundamentally questioned; the wife-mother woman would have to wait until the late 1800s for that idea to be criticized. While the New Woman movement sprang from a few middle-class individuals reaching only a select few, their audience appreciably increased between 1830 and 1869. According to Basche, they recorded the growing gap between a theory of woman's family vocation, an ideal of the wife-mother dependent on the man, and the reality of her condition. The reasons that drove them to underline the contrast between idealization of the woman and her subjection were often of a personal kind: unused talent, repressed vocation, and obligation to earn her living (14). No longer were women exclusively thought of as helpmate to man. People had to make a space for women who did not fulfill the vocation as wife and mother, and maintain a level of respectability to those who chose otherwise as significant participants in society.

The New Woman did not appear from nowhere. During the course of the nineteenth century, women had increasingly challenged their subordinate social and political position. They had a radical inheritance from the pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, had condemned the sexual double standard and urged women's right to education, employment and full citizenship. A common theme that held the New Women together was that they sought to reinvent their domestic role, not reject it. In the last decades of the century, ideas on progress, passion, morality, femininity, domesticity, development and evolution were replayed and reworked by New Women. One example of progress was women becoming published authors.. Not only were they becoming published authors, they were

writing the controversial New Woman who was expressing her individuality and social freedoms into their fiction.

According to Richardson, "New Woman novels became a vital and popular part of the late nineteenth century's cultural landscape and between 1883 and 1900 over a hundred novels were written about the New Woman. On the cusp, as she appeared to be, between fiction and fact, her status was fiercely debated on prose and parlours" (1). In order to be published and to promote women's rights, women oftentimes wrote under male pseudonyms. In addition to promoting women's rights, the novels often were seen as sensational. Janet Beer, author of *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin*, believes"New Woman writers frequently employed sensational plot elements (cross-dressing, prostitution, syphilis, and madness) in exploring feminist themes. Less explicit in their feminist intentions, sensational writers, nevertheless created strong-willed, single-minded and resourceful heroines who, like the later New Woman characters, chafed against the restrictions imposed on their lives but, unlike them, sought to address inequities covertly, through cunning and imposture, plotting adultery, bigamy and murder in the heart of the family" (Beer 90). While the New Woman character in fiction was defined as such, the New Woman in reality was altogether otherwise. The evolving New Woman would not stand for social disruption but for social and sexual reform.

One of the most powerful ways women demonstrated their desire for personal liberation was through the development of New Woman characters in literature. While she alarmed and stunned most male readers, she wowed and encouraged her female audience. "The most alarming revolution of modern times, was the emergence of a new type of heroine in women's writing; passion, sensuality and aggressive self-assertiveness had replaced the angelic and forbearing qualities of the protagonist of precious times: No one would understand that this

furious love-making was but a wild declaration of the "Rights of Woman" in a new aspect" (Beer 89). But they did. As more and more women began writing and reading New Woman based literature, the more women began expressing themselves in accordance. James Cooper, author of *The Roots of American Feminist Thought,* contends that "New Woman fiction was more than a literary response to the social changes brought about by the Victorian women's movement: it constituted, and conceived itself as, an agent of social and political transformation. The New Woman was invented by feminist periodicals which, aiming to mobilize widespread female support for a 'new political identity', encouraged woman-to-woman interchange and female debate" (4). After reading about the New Woman in literature, she became a multitude of concepts. She was a literary construct, a press fabrication and discursive marker of rebellion, writer, social reformer and feminist activist. Because of the multitude of roles she took on, many questioned whether or not she a real woman. Even the factual writers who defined and were defined as New Women were apt to shift and contest the parameters of these categories.

So, who was this New Woman and what did she look and act like? Emily Toth believed they were anything but dull:

> The new women are not "the pure 'nice' girls whose romance cultivates in a highly successful marriage. Nor are they old maids who bemoan the unhappy love of their youth…they have rejected the traditional fates of the independent woman: confinement to marriage, renunciation of sex. Instead, the new woman is usually single, appendage to no man, and a fighter against sexual inequality, both in its material aspects---the channeling of women to child care, housework, and economic dependence, and its psychological ones---the character structures

> created by the treatment of lover or spouse as property, and by the double standard. ("Free Love" 660)

It seemed as if the New Woman wanted to walk the streets and travel on the railway un-chaperoned. She wanted a more practical education and more experience of life before having to make major decisions. She wanted to do more in the open air, take more exercise, ride a bicycle, climb mountains and swim. What she strived for was the freedom to make her own choices and live with those consequences independent of society's opinion of her.

Beyond mirroring what women read in popular fiction, the New Woman would have been seen working as clerks, typists, teachers, journalists, or perhaps even shop girls; they lived in spartan flats, struggling to earn money for genteel gowns and living primarily on bread and tea. Additionally, they walked without chaperones, carried their own latchkeys, bicycled, and the more daring ones smoked cigarettes, cut their hair, or wore divided skirts and plain costumes in accordance with the principles of rational dress. Ann Heilmann, author of *New Women Fiction,* describes the basic characteristics of the New Woman:

> She is the product of the social evolution, which is going on around us. Above all she is striving for equality of opportunity with man to enjoy full life, and she seeks the right to make decisions for herself, the right to determine her own destiny. Her political demands reflected the crisis of the *ancient regime* beleaguered by issues of class, race, authority and ideology, while her 'sexual anarchy' exacerbated deep-seated anxieties about the shifting concepts of gender and sexuality. A vibrant metaphor of transition, the New Woman stood at once for the degeneration of society and for that society's moral regeneration. (1)

These new ways of being, called into question the social norms of the time that were accepted and promoted for so long. Choosing to consume oneself with the desire for new experiences, new sensations and new objects in life uprooted the traditional belief that women were born to marry, have children and remain domestic servants only. Instead, the women of the late nineteenth century became a crucial part of the fashion system, which violated the code of the proper feminine. Additionally, Lyn Pykett, author of *The 'Improper' Feminine,* states that "Her simple, close-fitting, tailor made and manly style of dress add a somewhat aggressive air of independence which finds its birth in the length of her stride; her attitudes are as strong and independent as her hands; she has a discontented mouth and a nose indicative of intelligence, and too large for feminine beauty" (138-139). So, with the job outside the home and a new fashion statement to match, what was it specifically these women sought?

While the forerunners for equal rights during the nineteenth century were termed the New Woman, their goals were not far removed from the feminist movement that was to follow throughout the following century. Feminists have traditionally sought an individual liberation for woman equivalent to that of, a freedom for the self-made woman to find limits of her own development without social interference. The nineteenth century New Woman's movement's emphasis had been giving those who wanted a different role the opportunity to pursue it. How did they predict this different role was to be achieved? James Cooper, author of *The Roots of American Feminist Thought,* saw achievement as: "Education [was] a crucial prerequisite for social mobility, the [voting] ballot [was also seen] as a meaningful weapon for change and finally, the intellectual advancement [through education] contributed to the successes of the New Woman" (6). While the New Woman was often seen as a rebel or so independent she could not tend to her domestic duties as wife and mother, rational feminists stressed woman's ability to

reason and believed this was not inconsistent with her ability to mother. They believed and promoted the ability to embrace both, nature and nurture, not one or the other. One challenge for the New Woman movement in the nineteenth century was reaching out to all women who wished to participate. While at first the movement was small, eventually it reached across continents to all women. While the movement reached many women, not all were ready for change.

The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than emancipation itself; however, of even greater interest is the history of women's opposition to emancipation. Of the first women to be antifeminist was Sarah Stickney Ellis in the late 1700s and early 1800s. She was considered the ever-dutiful advocate for women's duties, specifically in the home. Ellis was the author of several influential books in the early nineteenth century. Of them the most popular were, *The Wives of England, The Women of England, The Mothers of England,* and *The Daughters of England,* also her more directly educational works were *Rawdon House* and *Education of the Heart: Women's Best Work.* According to Francoise Basche, "Related to her principal literary theme of moral education for women, she established Rawdon House in Hertfordshire; a school for young ladies intended to apply the principles illustrated in her books to the "moral training, the formation of character, and in some degree the domestic duties of young ladies" (4). She also urged her readers to fight the three specifically female faults – selfishness, indolence, vanity – by cultivating 'habits of industry, feelings of benevolence and Christian meekness' (Basch 4). Her influence over young girls and women during this time directly affected to the ways in which society either accepted or denounced them. Girls were expected to accept their ascribed roles and if they chose not to, they were ostracized from their community.

British novelist Eliza Lynn Linton, one of the most controversial and hypocritical critics of the nineteenth century, continued the opposition to women's rights throughout the mid-late 1800s. She was a critic of women in her scathing *Saturday Review* articles. She used her novels and journal articles as a platform for attacking women who were fighting for equal rights. She maintained that politics, education and the right to an occupation was reserved exclusively for men. Her controversial and hypocritical ways were based on the ways in which she handled issues pertaining to women. What confused most people was that Linton herself was an emancipated woman. According to Nancy Anderson, author of *Woman Against Women in Victorian England,* "Rebelling in her youth, she left her provincial family to seek fame as a writer in London. Early in her career, Linton supported women's rights. Even then, however, she revealed ambivalent feelings about the nature and role of women, an ambivalence she eventually resolved by claiming freedom for herself in the man's world, while at the same time insisting that other women remain in the domestic sphere" (62). In 1891, she wrote "Wild Women as Politicians" which explained her belief that politics was naturally the sphere of men, as was fame of any sort. "Amongst our most renowned women," she wrote, "are some who say with their whole heart, 'I would rather have been the wife of a great man, or the mother of a hero, than what I am, famous in my own person." Linton is a leading example of the fact that men were not the only ones to organize the fight against equal rights for women. She called the New Woman cliché and said they were "never thorough as artists, tradeswomen, and philanthropists." For Linton, the New Woman was depicted as opposite of the fair young girl and ended up punished for their nonconformist behavior, which was the central reason for her opposition.

The more women writers included characteristics of and plots surrounding the emancipation of the New Woman, the more the popular image of the New Woman was received

with mixed reviews. In addition to female authors who opposed the liberation of women, male authors had a certain response that was provoked by New Woman fiction. Their responses were usually satirical in nature. The New Woman caricature was satirized in cartoons, poems, and essays, as well as other periodicals. They were made to look foolish and in response to their antics, many women rarely described themselves as New Women. Schaeffer contends, for when people spoke about the New Woman in the 1890s, they were usually referring to a very different figure: the unsexed, terrifying, violent Amazon ready to overturn the world. The 'New Woman' was a comic fictional figure composed of *Punch* cartoons, much-vilified novels, and ominous warnings in popular magazines (Schaeffer 39). Unfortunately, the women's rights campaigner was becoming a familiar if maligned figure, often satirized in cartoons and periodicals. Female authors and heroines alike were charged, often simultaneously, with sex antagonism and sexual intemperance, with having both too much sexual knowledge and too little sexual tolerance. A response to the New Woman by Lady's Realm in September 1898 states:

> That the opinions of the New Woman are not popular or general is a fact no one will attempt to dispute. She appeared as a sort of unnatural production which existed only for a time; she found neither welcome nor favor; she alienated her friends by the vehemence and want of judgment she exhibited, and delighted her enemies by her unmeasured and indecent attacks on all who differed from her; she shocked, and at the same time amused society by her crude ideas on lie, and by her absolutely impossible remedies for its resurrection. (Calder 164)

Because of their dislike of the characteristics of the New Woman, critics turned from excoriating real women to condemning characters in novels. This shift was detrimental. According to Talia Schaffer, "To label something literary rather than real is to quarantine it, in effect: to isolate it in

a special corner of life, to box it off as a special kind of phenomenon, not something one encounters in society at large. The New Woman could be marginalized and dismissed once they were relegated to the ranks of merely imaginary" (40). Was writing about the New Woman a way to marginalize her or a way to spread the good word? Were the women written about considered against the norm of what the New Woman was expected to be like?

Throughout the nineteenth century, women evolved from a sense of contentment with no viable alternative for the prospect of security outside of marriage between the parental home and possession by a husband to finding and expressing their liberated voice, in the form of the New Woman, through the writing of fiction. The nineteenth century's women's movement saw the union of suffragists, laying of the foundation for many rights to come, men voting on behalf of women's rights, women writers writing and being published and the emergence of the New Woman. While the New Woman hardly fit into one category, taking the many representations of who she was and her ideals as represented in fiction at the turn of the century, provide an important context in which to view the treatment of this cultural phenomenon. Simply because she was received negatively by some was no reason to give up the fight. The New Woman would continue to evolve in literature throughout the nineteenth century. Women writers would begin making their way into publication, thus presenting the New Woman to the masses.

Chapter 2

The Evolution of Literary Development and the New Woman in Literature

"Are there any lives of women?"
"No, my dear," said Mr. Sewell; "in old times,
women did not get their lives written,
though I don't doubt many of them
were much better worth writing than the men's."

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Pearl of Orr's Island*

"Literature depends on a tradition, on shared forms and representations of experience: and literary genres, like biological species, evolve because of significant innovations by individuals that survive through imitation and revision" (Showalter 34). A lot of the literature written by women during the nineteenth century that shared certain forms and representations of experience was the literary creation in fiction of the New Woman. The forms and representations of experience that were shared was an individual liberation for women to find limits of their own development without social interference. The nineteenth century New Woman's literature's emphasis had been upon giving those who wanted a different role the opportunity to pursue it. How did they predict this different role was to be achieved? James Cooper, author of *The Roots of American Feminist Thought,* saw that achievement as this: "Education [was] a crucial prerequisite for social mobility, the [voting] ballot [was also seen] as a meaningful weapon for change and finally, the intellectual advancement [through education] contributed to the successes of the New Woman" (6). That weapon for change and the intellectual advancement of women are what led to the publication of women writers during the nineteenth century. As the pages of the popular press throughout the 1880s illustrate, the New Woman, also labeled Novissima, the wild woman, the odd woman, the revolting daughter, and

numerous other names, ranked among the most controversial phenomena in late-nineteenth century. Drawing upon, and bringing to fruition, many of the aspirations of their foremothers, this new generation of emancipated women focused their critical look on the double gender standard, fought for women's right to higher education, worked to penetrate male middle-class professions, and became notorious for their, often controversial, literature. However, before this emancipated woman took to the pages, society would have to allow for a shift in the content and literary expectations of the female writer. There would be a movement from pre-civil war domestic fiction to post-civil war New Woman fiction, but not without a struggle.

The struggle came for women, as there was an ever-present teeter between the home and individuality, of which they were often forced to choose between; most women who were interested in a life outside the home struggled with an incompatibility between love and freedom. According to Elaine Showalter, author of "Tradition and the Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book," from *New Essays on The Awakening*, "Artistic fulfillment required the sacrifice of maternal drives, and maternal fulfillment meant giving up artistic ambitions" (39). This was the seesaw female writers were on when deciding which direction to go in, marriage or freedom, with their lives. Success for a woman, during that time, meant complete surrender in one direction; this choice, often times, was what drove many women mad. Olive Schreiner's poem "Life's Gifts," written in 1892, captures the dilemma of a woman who seeks to be independent, to define herself, in nineteenth century fiction:

> I saw a woman sleeping. In her sleep she dreamt Life stood before her, and held in each hand a gift--in the one Love, in the other Freedom. And she said to the woman, "Choose!"
>
> And the woman waited long: and she said, "Freedom!"

> And Life said, "Thou hast well chosen. If thou hadst said, 'Love,' I would have given thee that thou didst ask for; and I would have gone from thee, and returned to thee no more. Now, the day will come when I shall return. In that day I shall bear both gifts in one hand."
>
> I heard the woman laugh in her sleep.

The poem is directed "To a small girl-child, who may live to grasp somewhat of that which for us is yet sight, not touch" (Schreiner). This poem illuminates the predicament women felt during the 1800s and is directed at a young girl in the hopes that, what they could only see, she would someday touch. According to Emily Toth, in "Free Love," "If the heroine chooses Love, she loses her independence, her freedom to make any more choices for romance, marriage, and motherhood confine her to their sphere. If she chooses independence, Freedom, too often she must renounce Love, especially its sexual aspect. A third solution is hardly more attractive: a compromise marriage with a man who, because he is dull or maimed or both, places fewer restrictions on his wife" (647). However difficult the choice women were forced to make, many chose freedom either over or in addition to love. For those who chose freedom, as promised in the poem, Life continually revisited them challenging their decision and often times driving them mad.

So, while many women chose to remain dormant domestic servants, others took to pen and ink, sharpened their voices and began laying the foundation for the women's literary movement. While even the freest of women struggled upon their decision to write, they had worked so hard to be included in the text since its first conceptualization that they would never give up their plight. It took nearly two hundred years for women to finally be included into the text of "We the People," and, so, many worked towards sharpening their literary voice within a

society that narrowly defined the role of women. With the first established press by Stephen Dayes in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1638, colonial women writers, alongside their male counterparts, made early efforts to write the first words of what would become a new society (Rubinstein). Often because of their content, these texts became unavailable to readers throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. However, with the onset of feminist inquiry in the late nineteenth century, there was a rediscovery and reemergence of texts by early American women writers. This was important because without these texts and their insight into the past, many might never fully understand the journey of women's rights. It is through these rediscovered and reemerged diaries, poetry, novels, drama and essays, that we are better able to view history through the female lens.

In literature, the term "New Woman" did not officially exist until 1894. In this year novelist Sarah Grand used it in reference to those who were dissatisfied with nineteenth century prescriptions of womanhood. In her essay "The New Aspects of the Woman Question," which appeared in the *North Atlantic Review*, Grand wrote that "the new woman" is one who "has been sitting apart in silent contemplation all these years thinking and thinking, until at last she solved the problem and proclaimed for herself what was wrong with the Home-is-the-woman's-Sphere, and prescribed the remedy" (Grand 21). While many women identified with the contemplation of thinking and thinking and idealizing prescriptions for the remedy, the New Woman in fiction, indeed, in herself was a complex literary and social figure. The New Woman, as a literary and social figure, stood for more than a critique of the socially accepted dominant ideas about nineteenth century marriage. The New Woman represented ideals of female agency that had substantial precedent in American history. The first published writer in America, Anne Bradstreet, asserted her resistance to "each carping tongue," when she stated: "Who says my

hand a needle better fits" in defending her right to be a poet. In 1650, she knew that a profession to which men had unquestioned entrance would be an uphill battle for a woman and that skeptics might attribute her success as a poet to plagiarism or mere luck (Ledger 18). So, dating back to the 1600s, the New Woman looked like a poet. In the form of a writer, she began breaking free from being married with children.

Later, in the 1800s, Sarah Moore Grimke, women's rights activist and author, provided a new layer to the multilayered New Woman. As she herself wanted to attend law school, she began writing essays on behalf of women and challenged women's lack of education and the socialization that trained them to be dependent on men. The New Woman quality that she included in her literature was the foreshadowing that...

> ...this equality cannot, will not, be conceded until she too grows out of that stratum of development in which she is now in. Her imperfect education unfits her for acquiring that pecuniary independence which would lift her above the temptation to marry for a home. But be not discouraged sisters. Is not a dinner of herbs and simple apparel such as you can provide, infinitely better than sumptuous fare, costly attire, elegant furniture and equipage received in exchange for freedom and personal purity. (Ledger 23)

Grimke's New Woman was called to become educated so that she no longer needed to be dependent on man. In this, she foreshadows Charlotte Perkins Gilman's later arguments against the economic dependence of women on men.

Thematically and stylistically, pre-civil war women's fiction, variously described as literary domesticity or the sentimental novel, celebrates matriarchal institutions and idealizes the period of blissful bonding between mother and child. The artifacts, spaces, and images of

American domestic culture permeated nineteenth century literature. Showalter states that, "Women's narratives were formally composed of brief sketches joined together like the pieces of a patchwork quilt; they frequently alluded to specific quilt patterns and followed quilt design conventions of repetition, variations and contrast" (Showalter 37). The allusion to quilts and the patchwork, which makes a quilt whole, directly connect women to the home: the place where they were meant to create warmth and comfort through quilt making. The feelings that are conjured up when examining literature from a "patchwork" standpoint are those of domesticity; even so, during the late eighteenth century women writers were well known for their literary domesticity and the sentimental novel. Along with the inclusion of love and emotion, sentimentalism presented a view of human nature, which prized feeling over thinking, passion over reason, and personal instincts of pity, tenderness, and benevolence over social duties. Possibly the most prominent example of sentimental fiction in America is Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World.*

Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* is considered the first published sentimental novel of the nineteenth century. It is recognized for its accurate portrayal of the social limitations imposed upon nineteenth century women. The story traces the maturation of a young girl, Ellen Montgomery, from childhood to adolescence. Though generally valued less for its literary merit than for its historical significance, the work is considered one of the earliest examples of the domestic novel, a genre focused on the lives of ordinary women that became extremely fashionable after 1850 (Ardis "Women's Experience" 58). However, while the sentimental and domestic fiction novel was becoming more and more popular, it would not be until the middle of the nineteenth century before women began challenging this type of fiction and making the necessary alterations to shift the focus from the home to the woman, eventually coined: New

Woman fiction.

While much of American and British eighteenth century fiction centered on the domestic and sentimental novel, moving forward, post-civil war writers found themselves in a different cultural situation. The leisurely social world of women's culture began to dissolve as women demanded entrance to higher education, the professions, and the political world. The women of this generation began to assert themselves as the daughters of literary fathers, as well as literary mothers. According to Showalter, "Claiming both male and female aesthetic models, they felt free to present themselves as artists and to write confidently about the art of fiction" (38). This newfound confidence led to successful, published women in the nineteenth century. Many of the female writers, during that time, strove to represent their society as realistically as possible in literature. They provided authentic social detail for their settings and shaped characters to mimic real life scenarios. Women in non-domestic contexts, working outside their homes in new occupations were beginning to make their way into popular fiction. They were also seen, in fiction and reality, confronting cultural prescriptions for proper feminine behavior. Although the terms feminism and feminist first appeared in the late nineteenth century, they have been retroactively applied to the views and writings of several late eighteenth century essayists. These essayists, Mary Wollstoncraft of England, and Olympe de Gouges and the Marquis de Condorcet of France, each contributed to the emergence of feminist thought. The polarization of power, previously concentrated within the domain of patriarchal institutions, was moving toward a new center, or at least away from the concretized center of politics and the Church. Condorcet was primarily concerned with the juridical status of women; Gouges, the political; and Wollstonecraft, the social. Condorcet's philosophical theories were never formulated into political legislation to end the exclusion of women from the political arena, but they did serve as

a rallying point for those who followed. By contrast, Olympe de Gouges argued for militant commitment to the struggle to free women from the tyranny of men. Her goal was the mobilization of women to fight the forces of oppression. Wollstonecraft, operating in the less politically receptive England, addressed her messages of cultural transformation to women functioning in the domestic arena. She remained separated from the political battles and sought to fight her battle at a grass roots level, in the parlours and the kitchens of eighteenth century England (Sledziewski). Women confronted and challenged the roles prescribed to them by men through various means; some women fought for political rights, while others desired general social rights. The ways in which they accomplished their goals was unique to each individual. Writing and incorporating what they felt was equality and freedom, was one of the vessels women used to promote their message. Few women dared to put their hopes and dreams on paper; however, there were those few who were able to break free from the constraints placed upon them and write and publish who they wished to be.

Of those most noteworthy writers, and one of the first published women to challenge the patriarchal rules of society, was Jane Austen. Austen's irony went very deep in exposing the influence of wealth, fashion and snobbery and their effect on the woman. According to Francoise Basch, author of "Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel," "Her field of exploration is narrower than that of the Victorian novelists; but the heroines are not mythical, idealized or caricatured" (xv). This was significant because she was one of the forerunners for moving the pen beyond that of the sentimental, domesticated female character often seen in fiction. An example of this radical departure can be seen in her novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. In it, Elizabeth Bennet, the protagonist, is seen fighting for the equal rights of women. Austin writes her main character to be a nonconformist who lives according to her own rules, not those

prescribed to her by the dominant male figure. Although critics have concluded that Austen focuses on the usual, sentimental themes of female subordination, her protagonist clearly represent the contempt many women felt throughout the nineteenth century. This portrayal of the rebellious woman is what would be the foundation for other women writers to go even further with their contempt, slowly developing the characteristics of the New Woman.

Following Jane Austin, within the next few years, was Charlotte Bronte. While her fiction often includes the characteristics of the female condition, her main focus was on the incompatibility between marriage and freedom for women and the difficulties a lone woman faces when she seeks to meet man as an equal. Unfortunately, because of the times, her solution was usually the uneasy marital compromise. In *Jane Eyre*, for instance, Jane, the novel's protagonist, affects a sort of compromise and equal relationship with Mr. Rochester, but only because he is blind and needs her as she needs him. Interestingly, according to Emily Toth, "It is certainly noteworthy that only a maimed man finds woman his equal" ("Free Love" 648). Toth points out here one of the unfortunate compromises women were faced with during the nineteenth century; the choice between being alone and independent or being in a relationship with a disfigured male in order to feel equal. In *Jane Eyre,* the protagonist is as free and equal to her male counterpart; however, her male counterpart is disfigured. Regardless of the condition of Mr. Rochester, Bronte writes Jane's character as embracing the roles of a nineteenth century feminist. Jane does not depend on her beauty or feminine charm to trick men and is never afraid to speak truthfully about matters whether they are painful or not. Jane can be viewed as one of the first career women to make it in a man's world; when she marries, it is by choice. In the end, Jane Eyre becomes the strongest character in the novel. Charlotte Bronte was one of the forerunners for writing and publishing fiction that went against the ideal notion that the wife's

role in life and marriage is passive, pious and solely used for domestic purposes. However, on the contrary, she began to question the notions through the strength and assertion of her leading female characters.

A final predecessor to New Woman fiction was Alexandra Kollontai. Like Bronte, Kollontai presents a vision of the past, present, and future of women, in relation to revolutionary morality. Emily Toth points out that "Several themes are continually present (in her fiction): the difficulty of sustaining triangular relationships, no matter how open; the conflict between work and love; the necessity for women's uniting with and valuing each other ("Free Love" 661). In her story, *A Great Love*, based on Lenin's love affair with Inessa Armand, Kollontai writes of emotional dependency, the need to love, and the desire to live one's own life. She explores loneliness, vulnerability, the power of the sexual appetite to distort judgment and the tragic element of love. Toth suggests that "the separate universe the sexes inhabit and their resulting inability to comprehend each other, is seen in most of her fiction." Men lose the power to feel, in relationships with women; women lose the power to think, and both are psychically deformed in the process (Toth "Free Love" 661). The earlier independent women were forced to renounce sex; however, with the development of the New Woman comes the sexual freedom and independence most men were, naturally, awarded.

With the New Woman came a very slow understanding and acceptance by men. For men, the understanding and acceptance of the New Woman would take centuries. When men finally accepted the New Woman, they were termed the New Man. Unfortunately, many believed the life and fate of women were, in general, too much controlled by exterior law for it to be permitted to them to shape themselves into forms of their own being; however, this belief did not prevent women from trying. While women became used to hearing responses to their fiction

like those presented by Nancy Walker, author of *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life:* "'pleasing novelty and originality', 'dramatic and ingenious' and, finally, 'of the purest and healthiest tone'; which 'to the youthful romance reader its denouncement may seem sad; buts its lesson of duty and sacrifice should be well studied, as necessary preparation for the great struggle of life, in which it will be found that love cannot always reign supreme without the neglect of some essential duty," it did not stop them from forging on (15). Many allowed their literary careers to take precedence over whatever essential duty they were neglecting, proving to the world that their lives were just as full as their female domesticated counterpart. Mary Wollstonecraft responded to the condition of women in her 1792 manifesto, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*:

> In sermons or novels, however, voluptuousness is always true to its text. Men are allowed by moralists to cultivate, as Nature directs, different qualities, and assume the different characters, that the same passions, modified almost to infinity, give to each individual. A virtuous man may have a choleric or a sanguine constitution, be gay or grave, un- reproved; be firm till he is almost overbearing, or, weakly submissive, have no will or opinion of his own; but all women are to be leveled, by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance. (Quoted in Chapter 5:79)

Without this guidance, it might have taken women many more years before they began questioning their docile, domestic state of being. This helped women who were teetering between the incompatibility of marriage and independence. It helped them realize that life outside of marriage, with a literary career, could be just as fulfilling as being a wife and mother.

Because this New Woman was beginning to be included in fiction, women began incorporating certain behaviors they found desirable into their daily routines.

The notion that women were imitating art, as they began assuming the characteristics of the New Woman in literature, was one that began to be more widely accepted. Because more and more women writers were breaking free from the sentimental novel and moving into writing their protagonists to include characteristics of the free women, women began to imitate this new character. However, with this new literary freedom, women writers were constantly challenged. One such challenge was seen by Nancy Walker in *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life:*

> Women's imagination cannot leave the world of characteristic trait and expressive manner, so as to imagine and paint successfully the distinguishable, but not so easily distinguished, world out of which these characters grow. Women's fancy deals directly with expression, with the actual visible effects of mental and moral qualities and seems unequal to go apart, as it were, with their conception, and work it out firmly in fields of experience somewhat different from those from which they have directly gathered it. Women, in other words, could depict what they had directly seen and experienced, but were incapable of imagining anything beyond the actual and concrete. (14)

This notion that women could only write what they experienced would begin to be proven wrong over the next century. The things that women experienced were oppression, marginalization and prescribed societal expectations that chained them to the home as wife and mother and women writers were no longer interested in writing this type of character into their fiction.

The importance and influence that literature was beginning to have on society was forcing a shift in expected gender roles. In the cacophony of nineteenth century voices, both

male and female, which vied with each other to speak for or about woman or women, the novel stands out as perhaps the most influential and widely disseminated medium in which women spoke on their own behalf (Pykett 22). New Woman fiction resulted from women writers willing to break free from the socially prescribed roles assigned to them by men. Some examples, beyond the American Chopin, who wrote about the New Woman were, Jane Austin, Charlotte Bronte, and Alexandra Kollontai. They were the ones who were not afraid to begin moving away from the sentimental novel towards a more controversial type of fiction, which ultimately paved the way for New Woman literature. Their protagonists dared to be nonconformists, question their role in society, amount themselves to the same level as man and, finally, to question their sexual appetite.

While women writers, throughout eighteenth and far into the nineteenth century, continued to develop the characteristic of the New Woman in fiction, it did not come without criticism. According to Nancy Anderson, author of *Women Against Women in Victorian England,* woman suffrage posed a threat to the general population, male and female, because it challenged the gender ideology of the nineteenth century. It may have been for this reason that many women were opposed to the suffrage movement and inclusion of the New Woman in literature and society. For example, one individual wrote an anonymous letter to the editor in the New York *Herald* in 1852, after a Women's Rights Convention in Syracuse, in which she or he mocked its attendants as "mannish women" who wished to see man "consigned to his proper sphere: nursing babies, washing the dishes, mending stockings, and sweeping the house." The author asserts that the men present were merely "hen-pecked husbands" who "ought to wear petticoats" and seizes the opportunity to justify why women ought to be perfectly satisfied with their current state. The anonymous author continued on to describe a state of chaos and

confusion if women were ever allowed the right to vote, become lawyers, doctors or educated in subjects outside the home in general. It was this type of ignorance and resistance that kept women's rights activists motivated for change. To consider woman's law of nature as subservient was usual; however, to some men, but especially women, this was the underlying thought that sparked the necessity for change.

While detractors charged the inclusion of free women in literature with the basis of emotion rather than logic, women writers continued their plight. As the New Woman evolved, she began being seen more and more in literature and the public sphere. She went from the kitchen to the voting poles, from wearing long dresses to short skirts and pants, from the backseat of her husband's automobile to driving herself, from ignorant to a theorizing intellectual thinker and, finally, from being an elementary school teacher to the top of the graduating class in college. The New Woman would continue to appear in fiction throughout the nineteenth century, but few authors presented her in a way that depicted realistically the society in which they lived as successfully as Kate Chopin in, *The Awakening.* As women writers departed from domestic fiction and moved toward their protagonist taking on the characteristics seen in Sarah Grand's "The New Aspect…," their role continued to evolve to that represented in Austin's, Bronte's and Kollontai's fiction, to ,ultimately, being represented as the fully developed New Woman in *The Awakening.*

Chapter 3

The New Woman as seen in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful beast born in a cage. Although caged, the beast did not seem unhappy for he was cared for by an invisible hand. One day, he saw that the door had been left open by some accident. The beast went to the door continually, "each time seeing more Light," until suddenly he leapt out.

> On he rushes, in his mad flight, heedless that he is wounding and tearing his sleek sides, seeing, touching of all things; even stopping to put his lips to the noxious pool, thinking it may be sweet…So does he live, seeking, finding, joying, and suffering. The door which accident had opened is open still, but the cage remains forever empty. (Chopin "Emancipation" 37-38)

While the creature in Kate Chopin's story, "Emancipation: A Life Fable," is male, the experiences described anticipate those of many of Chopin's female characters throughout her life's work. This story carries the theme, which resonates throughout Chopin's novels, of self-definition. This theme of self-defining originates in her earliest writing, her commonplace book, in the late 1800s. The constant revisiting of Light (indecision), the eventual departure from the cage and the willingness to have joy and suffering in pursuit of freedom are some of the earliest signs of the New Woman, who is seen years later, fully developed, in *The Awakening.* Chopin's choice of a cage as the constricting element in this story is significant for its connection to a metaphor seen in other nineteenth century women's literature: the bird that is either caged or allowed to soar free. In most of her later developed fiction, Chopin's bird escapes the confines of the metaphorical cage. Her female characters longed to be set free from the constraints put upon them by the world in which they lived; the cage, not of their own building. Of her most

noteworthy novels, in which the female protagonist longs to be free is *The Awakening*. In it, Kate Chopin defied the expectations of women, both socially and as seen in literature, during the nineteenth century, as she developed and incorporated characteristics specific to the New Woman. While she never belonged to any women's liberation groups, she would gather her inspirations from the women who surrounded her growing up, as well as her personal desire to move beyond the preconceived notions on how women were to live in the nineteenth century.

One of the primary places Kate Chopin drew her inspiration from was her family, friends and childhood. Elaine Showalter, in her essay "Tradition and the Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book," called the nineteenth century culture in which Chopin lived a "...female world of love and ritual [which] was primarily defined by veneration of motherhood, by intense mother-daughter bonds, and by intimate female friendships" (36). Chopin lived and was raised in an all female home. Her earliest memories were defined by female love, bonding and friendship. This love is what "drew women together during every stage of their lives, from adolescence through courtship, marriage, childbirth and child rearing, death and mourning. Women revealed their deepest feelings to one another, helped one another with the burdens of housewifery and motherhood, nursed one another's sick, and mourned for one another's dead" (Showalter 36). Throughout her adolescence, Chopin had shared an intimate friendship with Kitty Garasche, a classmate at the Academy of Sacred Heart. The girls' read fiction and poetry went on excursions and "exchanged our heart secrets" (Bloom "Guides" 18). Though separated by Chopin's marriage and Garasche joining the convent, they reunited in adulthood. This theme of female love and bonding ran throughout many of her short stories; however, Edna Pontellier, the female protagonist in *The Awakening* and the character who closely mirrors Chopin's life, did not experience the close relations between women until much later in her life. The irony is

that Chopin was raised surrounded by women and Edna had no real female relationships until she grew older.

Chopin's relationships with the women in her life were of the utmost importance and significance to her. The love she shared with women is seen in the relationships throughout her works. These relationships often trumped others, especially those she shared with men. For the women this was acceptable, but for the men it was unbearable. While the relationships between women, and especially those surrounding Chopin throughout her life, were meaningful, their feelings and emotional bond was so deeply rooted in love that it made it nearly impossible for men to penetrate. This lack of connection kept men forever on the outside looking in. Showalter continues, "Men could not feel so pure the enthusiasm from women as they felt for each other," which often became the cause for a woman's desire to look beyond marriage for a meaningful relationship (36). A departure from nineteenth century expectations and marital traditions, in addition to their independence, the impenetrable female-to-female bond are what would draw many women outside the boundaries of their relationship with their husbands. The lure to look beyond marriage for entertainment, friendship and, often times, intimacy became common among elite upper class women; however, full fledged affairs were still considered taboo, which is why, among other reasons, *The Awakening* was ill received by many nineteenth century literary critics. Because of Edna's affair with Arobin, many saw the story as romantic fiction, not New Woman literature.

In addition to being surrounded by female love and bonding growing up, Chopin drew inspiration for her New Woman in *The Awakening* from the experiences she observed socially during her childhood. In the nineteenth century, women's groups and organizations were formed in order to promote equality and liberation for women. These groups and societies were

important because their members are those who became the forerunners for the first-wave feminist movement, which, ultimately, resulted in women's rights. Kate Chopin was a young girl when the movements began to form, and as she grew older she became interested in their primary purpose: women's rights. While Chopin never assumed an active role in any feminist organizations, she was a contributor to the New Woman movement through her literature "if the New Woman movement [was] conceived as the cultural and literary arm of first-wave feminist activism, with the underlying objective being the use of literature as a political tool for social change," which it was (Showalter 42). While it is impossible to know for sure what Chopin's objectives were, it is clear that her literature was a political tool for social change, whether she meant it or not. Though never joining the women's movement, Chopin was an activist as she included New Woman themes and characters in her short stories and novels. She did not attempt to instruct her readers, and is noted as saying, "Thou shall not preach," when responding to critics about the message in her fiction. Instead she would try to record, in her own way and in her own voice, the *terra incognita* of a woman's inward life in all its vague, tangled, chaotic tumult (Showalter 41-42). Chopin writes Edna as depicting this tumultuous inner struggle with domesticity and the desire for more; throughout the novel she is on a constant path towards change. Edna is always looking for more than her marriage can offer, and because of Chopin's honesty in writing her character's wants and desires, many women responded with a strong desire for change.

While Chopin never literally joined any groups, she was a member in a sense; using her ability to write and publish, she contributed to the fight for women's rights by incorporating the New Woman agenda into her novels. *The Awakening* aligns itself with nineteenth century female traditions of writing, in particular the fiction of the New Woman. According to Janet

Beer, author of *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin,* "She frequently engaged with the themes of New Woman fiction: the importance of female independence, tomboyish heroines who refuse to be feminized, women's conflict between art and love, unconventional marital arrangements, marital oppression, prostitution and congenital syphilis." Chopin wrote *The Awakening* to revolve around key concerns of New Woman fiction like marriage, motherhood and women's desire for a separate identity and bodily autonomy. She "reconceptualises these through the metaphors of gestation, awakening and sensual-spiritual epiphany" (93). Her protagonist, Edna Pontellier, is continually moving through personal awakenings and experiences sensual-spiritual epiphanies through her relationships with other women. She is married with children, yet desires a separate identity and bodily autonomy.

In addition to getting inspiration from her childhood and the women movements of her time, Chopin's literary inspiration came from the great historical philosophers and writers. As a girl, Chopin read the works of Warner and Stowe and had copied pious passages from the English novelist Dinah Mulock Craik's *The Woman's Kingdom* into her diary. Additionally, she read Darwin, Spencer and Huxley as well as Aristophanes, Flaubert, Whitman, Swinburne, and Isben (Bloom "British Women" 72). *The Awakening* marked a significant epoch in the evolution of an American female literary tradition. As an American woman novelist of the 1890s, Kate Chopin inherited a rich and complex tradition, composed not only of her American female precursor, but also of American transcendentalism, European realism, and *fin de siècle* feminism and aestheticism. Additionally, according to Elaine Showalter, "*The Awakening* broke new thematic and stylistic ground" (34). Chopin went boldly beyond the work of her predecessors in writing about women longing for sexual and personal emancipation.

Kate Chopin did not begin her writing career with her famous novel, *The Awakening*. In fact, her writing evolved over time from stories of women that move around the theme of emancipation to outright characteristics of what the New Woman looks and acts like. Similar to the society in which she lived, Chopin's writing evolved over time. By 1890, Kate Chopin had lost all her immediate family to death. She was thirty-four and alone with her sorrows. The tragic death of her father early in life, followed by the death of her brothers, and finally the loss of her husband and mother, left a stamp of sadness on Chopin that was never lost. According to Per Seyersted, author of *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*,

> The only one who seems to have been able to help her in her grief was Dr. Kolbenheyer...After [he] started reading her letters, he urged her to begin to write. He did this because he was struck with the literary quality of her descriptions...But the Doctor's main reason for encouraging her to take up writing was probably that he hoped it would give her some relief from the emptiness and deep despair to which her losses had reduced her and from the longing for the Lousiana that was so intimately connected with Oscar. (Seyersted 49)

And so, Kate Chopin began writing; she started out slow with a few short poems, but ended big.

Chopin's literary development began modest. She is noted as saying "she had written 'very diffidently at first,' in a diary comment on the reading of a self-confident neighbor's manuscript she observes that 'such belief in [one's] own ability is a bad omen'" (Seyersted 52). Because of her lack of confidence in her writing and the fact that she saw confidence as a bad omen, she began writing short stories and sending them in to magazines and journals in order to receive input on her writing. A friend and editor of the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, John Dillon,

encouraged her when he said that he was an opponent of the idea that man was intellectually superior to women, a notion highly accepted during that time. This prompted her to take on the task of writing her first novel, *At Fault*. In it, she slowly begins taking on themes of discontent within marriage. Critics of the novel concerned themselves with the language and treatment of characters from one to the other. According to Seyersted, "on the one hand, [people] criticized the large number of people whom they considered morally at fault in the book, and, on the other, commended it for its graphic descriptions and skillful characterizations" (53). Thus, Kate Chopin's literary career began.

Her next short story was not as widely accepted. "Young Dr. Gosse" was destroyed by Chopin in 1896 after not one publisher was willing to publish the short story. Shortly after this minor failure, according to Chopin, she concentrated her efforts on shorter forms of fiction. In these short stories she centered on the themes of Realism. Her focus on Realism became the foundation for her inclusion of the New Woman. Because what she observed disturbed her, she began writing New Woman fiction. She went on the publishing circuit and had many of these shorter stories published through her compilation book, *Bayou Folk.* "The book was the first of importance to deal with the Cane River country, and in scores of reviews, Kate Chopin was enthusiastically welcomed as a new, distinguished local colorist" (Seyersted 56). Along with the positive reviews, but lack of serious criticism for *At Fault,* the reception of *Bayou Folk* left Chopin pining for more critical reviews. In an, 1894 diary entry, she is noted as saying:

> In looking over more than a hundred press notices of "Bayou Folk" which have already been sent to me, I am surprised at the very small number which show anything like a worthy critical faculty. I had no idea the genuine book critic was

> so rare a bird. And yet I receive congratulations from my publishers upon the character of the press notices. (Seyersted 57).

As her literary career moved forward, few critics would impress her with an intellectual response to her fiction. She was not seeking praise, but literary criticism. Not long into her writing future she would receive more attention and criticism than she would know what to do with.

As she continued her short fiction, Chopin began delving deeper into the conflicts of womanliness and marriage. In her next short story, "The Story of an Hour," she writes of a subdued wife's vision of living only for herself. She highlights the thrill a married woman feels upon learning of the accidental death of her husband. The protagonist feels the freedom after having been like a caged bird in her marriage. The theme of self-assertion begins to take fruition in this short story, which, ultimately, becomes the main theme in her final novel *The Awakening.* Chopin's literary development and criticism continued with the publication of *A Night in Acadie* shortly preceding *The Awakening.*

Kate Chopin had a successful literary career by the time she was in her 30s. In 1897 she began working on what would become her final, most controversial, novel, *The Awakening.* Kate Chopin "never worked so energetically as she did on *The Awakening,* and no one could have guessed that this work was to be followed by little more" (Seyersted 74). In writing *The Awakening,* Chopin moved away from conventional techniques of realism to an impressionistic rhythm of epiphany and mood. According to Showalter,

> ...she abandoned the chapter titles she had used in her first novel *At Fault*, for thirty-nine numbered chapters of uneven length, ranging from the single paragraph of Chapter 28 to the sustained narrative of the dinner party in Chapter 30. The chapters are unified less by their style than by their focus on Edna's

> consciousness, and by the repetition of key motifs and images: music, the sea, shadows, swimming, eating, sleeping, gambling, the lovers, birth…Chapters of lyricism and fantasy, such as Edna's voyage to the Cheniere Caminada alternate with realistic, even satirical, scenes of Edna's marriage. (Showalter 43)

Based on her movement from unity to a more liberal style of writing, *The Awakening* is a novel about a process rather than a program, about a passage rather than a destination. It is a process in that it traces Edna's progressive development from dissatisfaction and depression, through mental and then sexual resistance, to physical withdrawal to a house, finally, to life and sexual-ownership rights of her own. It outlines as opposed to defining. As the reader, we are able to follow Edna's progression and formulate personal conclusions not prescribed by the author. Because Kate Chopin did not believe in preaching or teaching outright lessons, the reader is left to establish their own interpretation. In other words, she did not tell the reader how to interpret the text.

Kate Chopin's fiction, which is said to contain some of the most significant responses in American literature to the ideals for the New Woman, reflects important aspects of her own life. She enjoyed some rather unconventional activities for women in her day, such as smoking cigarettes, taking rides in streetcars without being accompanied by a man and pursuing a writing career early on in life. In addition to living an unconventional life, Kate Chopin's life parallels her protagonist Edna Ponteller in many ways. Both Chopin and Pontellier received Catholic school educations appropriate for an upper class Irish and French family, each married a young businessman, they both had six children and, following the death of their husbands, spent the second half of their lives devoted to themselves. The main difference was that Chopin spent the second part of her life living alone and writing what would become her best work while Edna

spent the second half seeking that solitude. Additionally, according to Nancy Walker, author of *Kate Chopin: A Literary Life,* like Chopin, Edna's experience with childbirth "seemed far away, unreal and only half remembered" (37). Chopin remembers her birthing experience in the following way:

> I can remember yet that hot southern day on Magazine Street in New Orleans. The noises of the street coming through the open windows, that heaviness with which I dragged myself about; my husband's and mother's solicitude; old Alexandrine the quadroon nurse with her high bandana tignon, her hoop-earrings and placid smile; old Dr. Faget; the smell of chloroform, and then waking at 6 in the evening from out of a stupor to see in my mothers arms a little piece of humanity all dressed in white; which they told me was my little son. (Toth "Unveiling" 32)

A commonly accepted belief in the nineteenth century was that when a woman experienced the pain of childbirth she would feel more love for that baby. The fact that her unconventional doctor chose to administer chlorophyll, providing Chopin with a painless birthing experience, and considering the common belief about the mother-child bond, the feeling was that she did not love her children as much as she would have if she brought forth her child in pain and sorrow. Like Chopin, Edna gave birth under the influence of chlorophyll and recounts the experience as "the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given, being added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go" (Chopin "The Awakening" 226). Both women's experience with childbirth were numbed and forgotten. On one hand, women were destined to suffer due to the "curse of Eve" and were expected to experience pain during childbirth. On the other hand, humanitarians

and the medical society believed that there were very good moral and technological reasons for controlling or eliminating pain in childbirth. Many upper-class mothers, with their education and liberal outlook, were ambivalent about motherhood. This influenced their attitudes toward the use of chloroform and the process of childbirth. Chopin not only gives birth under the influence of drugs, but also allows herself the liberation from bringing her children into the world through pain and sorrow. These experiences further demonstrate Chopin's willingness and desire to move away from the prescribed constraints of the nineteenth century.

While Chopin and Edna began moving towards female liberation through their childbirth experiences, Edna Pontellier's desire to take on the freedoms and liberties of a New Woman came shortly after her children were born. Edna was described, at best, as an unenthusiastic mother. While, to many, her neglectful actions were seen as harsh, she believed that her behavior had no adverse effects on her sons and that her absence taught them to be self-sufficient from an early age. According to Janet Beer, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin,* The over-solicitous care of stereotypical 'ministering angels', Chopin suggests, may not be in the best interests of the child (96). Kate Chopin wrote her protagonist as a woman who sought her own independence, thus producing self-reliant children. Through her desire to transgress against conventions of motherly behavior, Edna moved towards becoming more and more like the independent New Woman.

Despite her new womanliness, there are a few brief moments when the natural love for her children arises. While they occur sporadically, they are short lived. After having been absent for a short time, Edna goes to visit her children in Iberville. Her reaction to seeing her children after being away from them is captured by Beer:

> Every step that she takes towards independence brings her closer to 'voluntary motherhood', an affection no longer dictated by custom but imparted freely and willingly. In the process of reclaiming herself as an individual, Edna finds genuine pleasure in the thought of her children and, for the first time in the novel, seeks out their company: 'How glad she was to see the children! She wept for very pleasure…she lived with them a whole week long, giving them all herself, and gathering and filling herself with their young existence. (Beer 97)

At this point it seems that, when voluntary, Edna will give up more than the 'unessential' for her children, but in fact after having been with them and moving through the pangs of once again leaving them she forgets the sound of their voices and remembers her desire for solitude. Similar to the desire of the New Woman, Edna seeks and finds an inner kind of growth and independence when she is absent from the distractions of motherhood.

Chopin wrote her protagonist as departing from the conventional femininity of her era. Eighteenth and nineteenth century marriage was a union of man and woman, man being dominant and woman being submissive. This was the, mostly, acceptable union between man and woman. During that time, a middle-class wife would be hedged into domesticity by children, by domestic responsibilities and by duty to her husband. Wives had a duty to love their husbands and, through service to them, to ensure their husbands loved them. This, however, was not how Chopin wrote Edna and her marriage in *The Awakening*. While Edna sought independence and solitude from her children but teetered between their need for her and her need for them, all of her being resisted and revolted against her husband, Leonce. The nineteenth century ideal wife devoted herself wholly to her husband, children and domestic duties. Ideally, she never looked beyond the kitchen counter and certainly never entertained ideas about

independence. She was self-sacrificing not self-assertive. The nineteenth century wife would be dependent emotionally, physically and economically upon her husband making him feel all the more powerful and in control.

Edna, however, was not the ideal nineteenth century wife. Her desire for self-assertion and independence was ever present. She had a constant battle with an internal draw towards solitude. Chopin writes that on a sleepless night, Edna acknowledges with tears the "indescribable oppression" weighing on her soul. She senses the dawning of a "certain light" within her, a light both intoxicating, in its hint of other potentialities, and devastating, in its exposure of their impossibility for her (Chopin "The Awakening 886). This "light" she is describing can be traced back to the "Light" the caged bird continually revisited in her earliest story, *Emancipation.* Edna Pontellier continues her struggle to understand and move toward the intoxicating, devastating light throughout the novel.

In writing Edna's character as a wife seeking liberation from her husband, Chopin includes two contrasting female characters that represent the varying personalities of women during that time. The story juxtaposes two key characters alongside Edna to illustrate the few and fixed opportunities available to her. On the one hand, there is Adele Ratignolle who is seen as the ideal wife and mother with no impulses that deter her from her sole responsibility: her family. She embodies "every womanly grace and charm." The description of her beauty has the colorful ring of traditional poetry: golden unrestrained hair; "blue eyes that were like nothing but sapphires"; pouty, crimson lips (Chopin "The Awakening" 9). Dressed in pure white and bathed in sunlight, she is loved by all. Adele represents the ideal wife, mother and homemaker of the nineteenth century. This role is what Edna struggles to move away from throughout the novel; however, some women, like Adele, seem to thrive in that environment. According to Alice

Petry, of "Critical Essays on Kate Chopin, "Adele Ratignolle is happy precisely because she so relishes the meaningful roles of wife and mother. But such happiness comes with a price of which Adele may not even be aware: her selfhood" (24). It is this "selfhood" that Edna seeks to preserve, something she cannot do if married with children. Additionally, she cannot and will not assume the roles prescribed to her by the society in which she lives.

On the other hand, we see Mademoiselle Reisz who devoted her energies not to a husband or a home but to her own abilities. She is depicted as a homely and disagreeable woman who lives alone. Her apartment is dingy, her clothing shabby, her gait shuffling. Black lace and artificial flowers mark her appearance. According to Jerilyn Fisher, author of *Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender,* these two characters mark Edna's options: the reward of complete self-sacrifice versus the reproof of female self-assertion. No middle ground exists, only these extreme contradictions (23). While Adele provides Edna with the characteristics of a responsible homemaker, Mademoiselle Reisz exemplifies the life of a spinster. While the two contrasting characters are presented to Edna, almost as if she is being given a choice of whom to become, she chooses neither lifestyle. While she chooses her own destiny, both women provide lessons that lead her to her eventual destination.

Chopin continued to include themes and issues in her novel that went beyond the norm for nineteenth century fiction, especially women's fiction. She included the taboo subject of self-ownership, personal desire and sexual liberation and freedom for women. During the time in which Chopin wrote, patriarchy tended to convert women to sexual objects. Women were made to feel shame if they attempted to move beyond their objectivity. However, according to Elaine Showalter, "The heroine of the New Woman novel expressed her quarrel with Victorian culture through sexual means-by heightening sexual consciousness, candor and expression" (40).

One of the major feelings throughout the story is Edna's need for something more. Her desire for self-ownership and privacy is a constant source of friction. The right to self-ownership, for example in sexual and reproductive terms, was a key demand of the nineteenth century women's movement. Janet Beer states "A wife had no legal entitlement to refuse sex to her husband." Edna's emotional and sexual denial of her husband and her need for personal freedom are more signs of the emergence of Chopin's New Woman.

Beer continues her analysis of Edna's desire, "In the course of her feminist awakening she becomes more resistant to Leonce: 'her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She denied and resisted.'" Edna begins withholding herself from him sexually, claiming her right to self-determination. As her resistance becomes more frequent, Leonce complains to Dr. Mandelet, "She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women" (94-95). Because of the times and the newness of the New Woman, Leonce does not understand Edna's desire for selfhood. In addition to seeking help from a medical doctor, he looks to Edna's father for answers. Her father responds, "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it" (Chopin "The Awakening" 954). Edna's father represents the older generation, however, his feelings are not far from the acceptable treatment of women of Edna's generation. At the same time Edna is denying Leonce intimacy, she begins experiencing sexual awakenings outside her marriage.

As Edna's desire to move beyond the constraints of wifehood and motherhood become more difficult for her to resist, so to does her desire to experience true love. For Edna, this experience, unfortunately, is that of another man outside her marriage. Edna takes on a friendship with the younger, single Arobin. This friendship, in and of itself, goes against the ways in which nineteenth century women were expected to behave. Being alone with a man,

walking and talking with a man and, ultimately, having an affair with a man goes against all values during the nineteenth century; yet, Chopin wrote her protagonist in this way to show that a woman's sexual desires are not always exclusive to her husband and that they belong to her and no one else. At this point, though seemly out of control with emotion, Edna is very much in control of her sexual desires. While Edna's seduction by Arobin reads as if it takes place in a dream-like state, Chopin brilliantly evokes sexuality through images and details. Through this love affair Edna imagines that her union with Arobin will bring permanent ecstasy; it will lead, not to "domestic harmony" like that of Adele, but to "life's delirium." However, in staying with her need for autonomy, she knows "that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him, would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone" (Chopin "The Awakening" 32). Thus, saying this suggests that Edna knows that neither male companionship nor seduction is key to a woman's search for self.

Kate Chopin's decision to include moments of sexual freedom was a sign of her progressive, feminist writing. She wrote Edna's character as having experienced sexual desires outside her marriage, which was a very common thread that held New Women together. Her frank treatment of female sexuality broke new ground at a time when married women held no legal rights over their bodies and when few other female or feminist writers were willing to explore women's sexual desire. In keeping with the novel's emphasis on the self, several scenes suggest Edna's autoeroticism. Showalter highlights one of Edna's first sexually free moments, "Edna's midnight swim, which awakens the 'first-felt throbbing of desire,' takes place in an atmosphere of erotic fragrance, 'strange, rare odors…a tangle of the sea smell and weeds and damp new-ploughed earth mingled with the heavy perfume of a field of white blossoms'" (43-44). Both, the fact that Chopin wrote about a woman having sexual feelings and that Edna's

experience was independent of her husband, are characteristics of the New Woman. Other nineteenth century female writers and previous works ignored sexuality or spiritualized it through maternity, while *The Awakening* was involved with the body and with self-awareness through physical awareness. According to Emily Toth, "*The Awakening* was planted firmly within the traditions of women's writing, where [Edna's lack, but desire for freedom was seen] as a standard trope for the unequal sexual relations between women and men" ("Free Love" 53). That inequality is juxtaposed in Edna's story; she is liberated, both emotionally and sexually, while her husband is left behind with the home and children.

Paradoxically, Kate Chopin chose to use the same act that provided Edna with the fullest sense of liberation, but also becomes what will lead to her eventual death; learning to swim was Edna's final, most significant awakening. Janet Beer summarizes, both the moment she learns to swim and the moment she realizes she is finally free:

> Edna Pontellier's euphoria at learning to swim pinpoints the conceptual, and feminist, dimensions of Chopin's complex metaphor of a turn-of-the-century woman's 'awakening' to her ability to 'control the working of her body and soul'... It establishes her sense of self-ownership, physical, mental, and spiritual, which in turn triggers two fundamental insights that determine her progression from disengaged wife to autonomous subject: in control of her body, she becomes aware of its potential for pleasure and learns to claim her right to self-determination. Her "New Woman" emerges when she says 'I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose'. Edna's proclamation of rights is the equivalent of Chopin's claim to

> independence in her choice of subject matter, as is the desire to venture 'where no woman had swum before.' (87)

When Edna first learned how to swim, she experienced opposing feelings: exultation and a flash of terror. Both feelings are significant in that, while she is moving towards her self-awareness and independence, she is also experiencing fear. In the end, Edna swims out where no woman has swum before, and never returns. Her ability to swim and her desire to swim out where no woman has swum before are symbolic of the New Woman and her eventual death is a metaphorical rebirth. Donald Ringe's summation, in his essay *Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening*, "Edna develops a growing self-awareness from which there is no turning back" (583). Because of the conflicting interpretations of Edna's death, Kate Chopin's ending has received endless critical interpretations.

Readers of the 1890s were well accustomed to drowning as the fictional punishment for female transgression against morality, and most contemporary critics thus automatically interpreted Edna's suicide as the wages of sin. Accordingly, the ending seems to return Edna to the nineteenth-century female literary tradition, even though Chopin redefines it for her own purpose. On the other hand, according to Janet Beer, "Edna's suicide is a passionate assertion of her new-found identity and unconditional refusal to accept compromise: a rejection not of herself but of a social world that imposes moral imperatives on human desire, a celebration of this desire within a natural context that knows neither boundaries nor limits" (89). In this, Edna is a New Woman in that through her death she rejects the compromise of becoming someone she is unable and unwilling to become, a wife and mother. In a realistic sense, Edna is about to swim to her death; symbolically, however, she triumphs over her condition. Through her death, she has broken free from the patriarchal structures of marriage.

Choked by the cloistering, moralistic garb of the Victorian era, yet willing to give up everything, even her own life, for the freedom of unencumbered individuality, Edna Pontellier epitomized the New Woman of the nineteenth century. To many, she embodied the social ideals for which women of that era were striving. The idea that Edna was what women were starving for, combined with the fact that Chopin was already an established author, seemed an indicator that *The Awakening* was destined for success. One month before Chopin's novel was published, Lucy Monroe reviewed *The Awakening* for the March 1899 issue of Book News. Monroe's review praises Chopin's work as a "remarkable novel" and applauds it as "subtle and a brilliant kind of art" (Toth "A Writer" 329). Monroe further depicts the novel as "so keen in its analysis of character, so subtle in its presentation of emotional effects that it seems to reveal life as well as represent it" (Toth "A Writer" 328). Monroe's was a glowing review indeed, and undoubtedly heightened the mounting anticipation with which Chopin, her colleagues, and her publisher eagerly awaited the release of *The Awakening*.

However, for too many, the nineteenth century was not ready for an author like Kate Chopin or a novel like *The Awakening*. There are records of the critical reception of the novel dating back to its first publication. The first review, by Frances Porcher in the St. Louis "Mirror," appeared two weeks after its publication in April 1899. She reviewed the book calling it depressing and shocking. In August 1899, an anonymous reviewer reported in "The Nation" that:

> *The Awakening* is a sad story of a Southern lady who wanted to do what she wanted to. From wanting to, she did, with disastrous consequences; but as she swims out to sea in the end, it is to be hoped that her example may lie for ever undredged. It is with high expectation that we open this volume, remembering

the author's agreeable short stories, and with real disappointment that we close it.

The recording reviewer drops a tear over one more clever author gone wrong. (96)

These reviewers set the tone for most of the reviews that followed. Janet Beer reports that "The storm of moral outrage at Chopin's 'unutterable crimes against polite society' quickly overshadowed appreciation of her 'flawless art'. Though acknowledged as a 'brilliant piece of writing', this was 'not a pleasant story' nor a 'healthy' or 'wholesome' book, critics warned, condemning [it] as 'essentially vulgar', 'morbid', 'repellent', even 'nauseating' and 'gilded dirt' that left one 'sick in human nature'" (88). Because of the social expectations of women, it was impossible for most people to understand and accept a story about a woman willing to give up her life for the freedom of unencumbered individuality. While the scene appeared set for the literary introduction of the New Woman, many people were still not ready. The following gives a sense of how deeply extended into the fabric of the times were public feelings against women's autonomy: "It is not a healthy book," reported the St. Louis Globe, "It leaves one sick of human nature," contended The Mirror and, finally, it was described by the Chicago Times-Herald as an "overworked…sex fiction" (Fisher 23). Because of the negative reception of her novel, the critics sent Kate Chopin into a literary underworld.

In what has become a well-known response to the attack on her novel, Chopin implies that Edna and the rest of the novel's characters were simply beyond her control:

> Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have

excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late. (Toth "Private Papers" 158)

However negative the reception, Kate Chopin's literary success during the 1800s did not go unrecognized. She was already an established, successful author who had received positive recognition for her previous works. Mainly, the literary critics were expecting to read a local colorist novel about the people of New Orleans; local color was a common theme of her previous novels, *At Fault* and *Bayou Folk*. Because this was not what they read and because of the shocking appearance of the New Woman, critics put the novel and Chopin in temporary hiding.

Neither *The Awakening* nor Kate Chopin would be gone forever. While the book went unnoticed for 30 years, eventually it was brought back into the spotlight. The first to revive Chopin's work following its banishment into obscurity was Daniel S. Rankin, a Roman Catholic priest. It is interesting that he would, in 1932, publish *Kate Chopin and her Creole Stories*. Kate Chopin's novel was controversial during her time, and when Rankin revived it, it remained the same. It was interesting that a priest brought it back from the dead because of the content. After Rankin briefly revived *The Awakening* in the 1930s, the spotlight of literary interest would not shine again on Chopin's work until 1953, when Cyrille Arnavon wrote an essay to introduce his translation of *The Awakening* into French. The local and international revivals ignited a spark of interest in Chopin's work, but it was extinguished almost immediately. In 1969, however, almost three quarters of a century after *The Awakening* was published in 1899, Chopin's novel began its ascent into literary distinction (Toth "Unveiling" 182-184). Per Seyersted, one of Chopin's biographers, published *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* and *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Seyersted's books helped land the work of the late novelist on the literary map. They depicted the complete range of Chopin's artistry, and brought to the field of feminist literature a

new champion in Edna Pontellier. It was he who said that the greatest achievement of Kate Chopin was that she broke new ground in American literature. He goes on to note that she was the first woman writer to accept passion as a legitimate subject for serious, outspoken fiction. She revolted against tradition and authority by giving the world an uncompromising look into woman's submerged life, thoughts, emotions and desires. She was, indeed, a pioneer; unfortunately, she was too much of a pioneer to be accepted in her own time and place.

Just as the social context and cultural confinements of the late nineteenth century worked against Chopin's unique and advanced artistry, the liberal and progressive social culture of the late 1960s worked in its favor (Toth "Unveiling" 188). Since its reemergence, there have been countless feminist critics, both positive and negative. As early as 1970, feminist critics called Edna the embodiment of nineteenth century feminist criticism. According to Joyce Dyer, author of *The Awakening: A Novel of New Beginnings,* Chopin, it was said, amounted her feminist theory to the likes of Margaret Fuller, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, August Bebel and John Stuart Mill (26). While her status as a forerunner for women's rights was tainted by her novel in the nineteenth century, during its revival throughout the 1960s, Chopin was elevated to heroine status. Since its reawakening, *The Awakening* has become known as Kate Chopin's finest piece of feminist fiction.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century saw women calling for what Virginia Woolf would eventually call for 'a room of one's own.' The small but significant examples from Susan B. Anthony's circle in the nineteenth century and women faculty in the 1930s was taken up by a generation of women in the second wave feminist movement. Women, wanting the space to write, struggled to find their own rooms (Malin 3). While Kate Chopin provided her reader with two diametrically opposed paths for a woman, she never tells the reader what to do or with

whom to agree. Some believed that with each step towards liberation came that familiar sense, explicitly felt by women, of the incompatibility between love and independence. It seems as if both Chopin and Edna were caught between two worlds, caught between contradictory definitions of femininity and creativity, and seeking either to synthesize them or to go beyond them to an emancipated womanhood and an emancipated fiction. This common feeling felt exclusively by women and the desire to move beyond it is what lead to first, second and third-wave feminist movements. Kate Chopin described the characteristics of the nineteenth century New Woman in her novel. She called for social change. While at the time it was received with much criticism, it reemerged with open-arms providing inspiration for new feminists with new social issues. Looking back through the history of feminist literature, are we who they wanted us to be?

Chapter 4

Are We Who They Wanted Us to Be?

The Twenty-First Century New Woman

> "A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before."
>
> Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and her introduction of the New Woman, Edna Pontellier, paved the way for future generations who sought change. Though the novel would virtually disappear for a number of years, its reemergence would stand to change the ways in which people interpreted the history of women's liberation. Kate Chopin and *The Awakening* lend a fresh and honest account of where women's rights originated, who the New Woman was and what she stood for and against. At the time Chopin published *The Awakening*, society for both men and women was undergoing a great amount of change, not unlike today in some regards. For women, the transformations were remarkable. Social reformers, such as Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams, sought to further transform the moral and social landscape for women's greater participation in society. The turn of the twentieth century saw the New Woman emerge, further transforming women's roles: a shift from the domestic woman to a more independent, self-sufficient woman. The characters that Chopin wrote into her novels showed a brave face to the world, some refusing to accept the constraints of tradition and walking away from the expected roles and behavior for women. After being published and removed from the world because of its controversial content, thirty years later *The Awakening* reemerged and became a leading text for feminist literature. Although it was ill received, Per Seyersted argued that

Chopin "broke new ground in American literature." Seyersted continued:

> She was the first woman writer in her country to accept passion as a legitimate subject for serious, outspoken fiction. Revolting against tradition and authority; with a daring which we can hardy fathom today; with an uncompromising honesty and no trace of sensationalism, she undertook to give the unsparing truth about woman's submerged life. She was something of a pioneer in the amoral treatment of sexuality, of divorce, and of woman's urge for an existential authenticity. She is in many respects a modern writer, particularly in her awareness of the complexities of truth and the complications of freedom. (82)

It is impossible not to read her novels through a twenty first century lens set in today's worldly context; however, through her writing we are gifted the ability to look back through history and experience the nineteenth century's expectations of women. It is also possible to read about those who demanded change, witness the evolution of women's rights, better understand the characteristics of the New Woman and see if, today, we are who the forerunners for women's rights wanted us to be?

Kate Chopin had several messages for her readers and she used her protagonist, Edna Pontellier, as her means of expression. As a writer Chopin expressed several themes throughout her novels, some more apparent than others. One of the strongest themes that run through her literature, and especially *The Awakening*, is female self-awareness and assertion. Because of the social expectations of women and the patriarchal society in which she lived, there was an incompatibility between that which was expected based on socially preconceived notions, and that which was desired. Many women accepted their fate and gave up who they were in order to fulfill the socially preconceived role as wife and mother; however, even though this was

accepted by so many, Edna could not. She was incapable of giving herself over fully to the one's who desired her most. In the story Edna is quoted as saying "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me." Throughout her continual evolution from what was expected of her to the independent woman she would ultimately become, she was unable and unwilling to compromise her individuality. Chopin did not mean for women to lose themselves in the roles set forth by someone else, but rather, she wanted women to have the right to choose and in choosing feel confident in their decision.

In order to provide a choice, she allowed Edna to see both types of women. By experiencing the roles of two stereotypical women, one the quintessential housewife and mother and the other the epitome of a single lady, Edna was more equipped to choose which role was more suitable for her. Adele represented the happy homemaker and Mademoiselle Reisz, the single, childless, artistic musician with a courageous and defiant soul. The ability to see both roles and choose who to become was a gift that Chopin gave to Edna; this choice was generally not awarded to women in the nineteenth century, but rather they were often forced into marriage and motherhood based on the expectations of that time. In the end, Edna did not choose between the two women, she chose herself. Chopin's message through Edna's choice was that all women were deserving of planning out their own lives and destiny. She used Edna as a cornerstone for a woman's right to choose.

In her essay "Kate Chopin's Problematical Womanliness: The Frontier of American Feminism," Gina Burchard provides a different perspective and understanding of Chopin's theme of self-assertion:

> The joy of self-assertion need not always be interpreted strictly as feminist sentiment; but in this context, with the implication that marriage can be a prison even for a woman who loves her husband, the feminist impulse is strong. And while it cannot be assumed that the story is a true reflection of Kate Chopin's feelings about her own marriage, it surely exhibits that the author had a clear understanding of the restrictiveness of the marriage relation and of the desirability of independence, at least from some women. (39)

Chopin's novel and feminist literature, in general, can be read less as feminist banter and more as stories seeking equal rights for both women and men. Chopin revisits her message about choice when she continually entertains the dichotomy of "the dual life, that outward existence which conforms, with the inward life which questions" (26). Simply by allowing for a choice did not make choosing how to live an easy decision; but on the contrary, like today's mother, choosing to stay home and raise one's child versus being a member of the working world is a tough choice for women. It is especially difficult to address the issue as a mother because of the guilt that accompanies the decision to leave the home. In her 1968 essay, A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood," Joan Zlotnick observed, "Lodged in the unconscious are one's secret impulses and repressed yearnings. They are unconscious because we fear the consequences of bringing them forth into consciousness: guilt and anxiety which threaten our emotional well-being and the maintenance of the life patterns we have established" (4). We are better able to understand the internal struggle, which many women faced because she illuminated their concerns. It took an incredibly assertive woman to confront these issues, especially at the turn of the century. Women fought for centuries for the position they are in today; however, there is still a struggle between domesticity and a career outside the home.

In addition to *The Awakening,* Chopin used other books as vehicles for change. In *The Awakening* Kate Chopin chose to portray a woman who sought freedom from the confines of her marriage, a theme that is also seen in *At Fault* (Burchard 38). Additionally, Chopin chooses emancipated womanhood in "The Story of an Hour." In it, a young wife is told of her husband's accidental death. Initially stunned, she fights to suppress the realization that finally overwhelms her: and unanticipated, overwhelming ecstasy at the thought of her freedom. Embedded in "The Story of an Hour," is an "extremely radical, even subversive view of the institution of patriarchal marriage and family, in which the power is traditionally held by husbands, not by wives, and certainly not by children (Martin 5). In many of her novels, Chopin's life, and the choices she desires for the women of her time, mirrors that of the protagonist. According to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in Harold Bloom's "Notes," "In one moving passage, [Chopin] does imply that her own independence derived in no small measure from the deaths of her husband and her mother—that is, from her release from social constraints as embodied in those she loved." She continues, "...the constant, underlying current in her writings makes it clear that she took no inconsiderable pride in having attained a sophisticated and independent maturity on her own within the limitations that her society imposed" (59). She had a complete sense of empathy and understanding of nineteenth century expectations for women and sought change through her writing, which also applies to twenty first century women.

Because of the incompatibility between love and freedom, often times Chopin made the choice easier for her female protagonists by not giving them one in the first place. While most of her female characters struggle after succumbing to marriage, some avoid it altogether. In "Wiser than a God," protagonist Paula Von Staltz, a talented musician, will not marry because it "doesn't enter into the purpose of my life." She asks, "Is music anything more to you than the

pleasing distraction on an idle moment: Can't you feel that with me, it courses with my blood through my veins? That it's something dearer than life, than riches, even than love" (Zlotnick 2)? In this example, Chopin provides the reader with a woman who, because of her love of music, only wants to experience the joys of life parallel to her partner, not conjoined. Marriage does not fit her purpose in life, which is music. She believes it is more important than love and wishes for her partner to experience it with her, not for her. It was through her writing that Kate Chopin got her message to women that they were deserving of a choice in what to do with their lives and that they should strive for self-awareness and assertion.

In addition to the theme of self-awareness and assertion, Chopin's novels center on the notion that during the nineteenth century, women were expected to strive to be nothing less than wife and mother. One of her clearest expressions is woman's ambivalence toward her proper role as wife and mother. An example of this can be found in "Athenaise." Gina Burchard states, "It is not her [Athenaise's] husband but the state of matrimony that repels her:

> No, I don't hate him...It's jus' being married that I detes' an' despise. I hate being Mrs. Cazeau, an' would want to be Athenaise Miche again. I can't stan' to live with a man; to have him always there; his coats an' pantaloons hanging in my room; his ugly bare feet—washing them in my tub, befo' my very eyes, ugh! (40)

Nineteenth century society saw women as no more than wife and mother, and assumed that the roles were accepted enthusiastically and without no qualms. In the previous passage, the protagonist does not hate her husband but the person she sacrificed in order to become his wife. She wants to return to her self. Again, this idea that women succumb and lose themselves in order to fulfill a role is a timeless notion. Whether it is the nineteenth, twentieth or twenty first

century, women have struggled with this losing of oneself in marriage and motherhood for centuries.

Chopin expresses these motherly issues through Edna as she moves farther away from her husband and children as she seeks her individuality. While these issues originated on paper around the turn of the century, the emotions attached to them remain current in today's household. The idea that one should not surrender fully to another strikes chords of interest and relevancy in twenty first century women, even though a hundred years and differences in personal and cultural experience separate today's literature and women from the nineteenth century. The question remains: because a person is married and has children, is it necessary for them to give up themselves or is it possible for them to hold true to oneself while giving part away? Dana Kinnison, author of *Female Resistance to Gender Conformity in Kate Chopin's The Awakening,* poses the question: "What does it mean to give oneself?" And contends that "Edna's bonbon eating existence may have gone the way of her parasol, but the domestic confinement that accompanies motherhood even today continues to be a dilemma for many women" (24). This dilemma is whether or not it is possible to be a wife and mother without losing oneself in the process. The question remains, is it possible to be "an appendage to no man and a fighter against sexual inequality…[and avoid] the channeling of women to child care, housework, and economic dependence, and its psychological ones…[and also] the character structures created by the treatment of lover or spouse as property, and by the double standard?" (Toth "Free Love" 660) Kate Chopin's message at that time, which is timeless as it applies to women of the twenty-first century, was that women were deserving of a choice; women had the humanistic right to choose who they wanted to become and whether or not they wanted to run the household or a business. It sounded like a simple right; however, it was not interpreted as such.

In order for Kate Chopin to get across her most important message, women's rights and equality, she chose to write the New Woman into her novels. In writing the New Woman into her novels she paved the way for first, second and third wave feminism. These historically significant women were the people who sought, fought and ultimately accomplished their goal of equal rights for women. While the nineteenth century New Woman does not directly affect twenty first century women, it is through her that feminist movements were born. Chopin's idea was to abandon and revise traditional womanly roles and expand them into the public sphere. In many ways, this approach is a descendent of the sentimental tradition of domestic fiction, but whereas the sentimentalists remained content to produce literature that exerts the influence of proper feeling and to envision women staying within the household and exerting a maternal influence, New Women wanted to take their brooms out of the parlor, even off the front stoop, and right into the street. The New Woman wanted a more practical education, more experience of life before having to make major decisions, and she wanted to make her own. What she strived for was the freedom to make her own choices and live with those consequences independent of society's opinion of her.

As women began emerging from the home, this new sense of freedom was felt throughout the world, not just in America. In fact, without the strong influence internationally, American women might have had to wait longer in order to gain their equality. As first wave feminism was beginning in America, so to were the equal rights for women in Europe. Their plight had endless positive effects on America. Historians point to the French Revolution as the catalyst or turning point in the fight for women's rights. Riots and demonstrations by women were common throughout Europe, but French women led the way with their extensive participation in insurrections. By centering on the fight for individual rights, the French

Revolution, by extension, provided a forum for women to argue for their own rights as individuals. Women took to the podium and the press with their public message to abolish inequality between the sexes. They proclaimed their hopes, demands, and proposals for reform (Sledziewski). As they moved forward, their efforts brought forth change. The Constitution of 1791 granted French women equal rights in many areas. Daughters now shared equally in the division of estates of those who died intestate. By defining civil majority in equal terms for both men and women, the Constitution acknowledged women as possessing sufficient reason and independence to serve as witnesses to public documents and to share in communal properties (Sledziewski). Therefore, women were publicly recognized as possessing those faculties of reason and rational thought previously located solely within the male domain. This new movement, rising from the blood and terror of the French Revolution, became known as Enlightenment feminism. The essential claim of Enlightenment feminism was that women, by not being denied powers of reason, must be granted the moral status appropriate to rational beings, which status previously reserved for men. They argued that women's very existence, as rational beings should, by extension, open the door for their fight for equal rights and freedom from domestic and institutional oppression. As more and more women were gaining equal rights in Europe, at the same time, the platform for first wave feminism was being constructed in America. This platform became the springboard from which the New Woman sprang.

The New Woman gave rise to the various waves of feminism; however, before these movements came to fruition the New Woman had to emerge in society beyond the pages of literature. Beyond mirroring what women read in popular fiction, the New Woman would have been seen working as clerks, typists, teachers, college students, journalists, or perhaps even shop girls. Additionally, they walked without chaperones and the more daring ones smoked cigarettes

and cut their hair. Ann Heilmann, author of *New Women Fiction,* described the basic characteristics of the New Woman:

> She is the product of the social evolution, which is going on around us. Above all she is striving for equality of opportunity with man to enjoy full life, and she seeks the right to make decisions for herself, the right to determine her own destiny. Her political demands reflected the crisis of the *ancient regime* beleaguered by issues of class, race, authority and ideology, while her 'sexual anarchy' exacerbated deep-seated anxieties about the shifting concepts of gender and sexuality. A vibrant metaphor of transition, the New Woman stood at once for the degeneration of society and for that society's moral regeneration. (1)

The nineteenth century watched as women went from the kitchen to the classroom, from stockings to slacks and from the backseat to the driver's seat. Women's lives at the end of the nineteenth century were changing dramatically on various fronts. In the patriarchal society in which they lived, women began demanding an equal opportunity for education. Because there was such a strong force of women who supported equal rights, men had no choice but to allow for change. From 1890 to 1920, women comprised 55% all high school students and 60% all high school graduates. By 1900, all but three state universities admitted women on same terms as men (Lavendar). An education meant that women were becoming qualified for more than domestic occupations; women wanted careers outside the home. Increasingly, women were found in the previously male domains of business and the professions. Women were forming groups and movements in order to move beyond the, formerly accepted, constraints of a patriarchal society.

The New Woman was part of a free ranging spirit of rebellion at the turn of the century.

The women's movement became a refusal to heed the abstraction of womanhood, the calcified definitions of female character and nature handed down to them by previous generations. As Charlotte Perkins Gilman described her: "Here she comes, running, out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman" (Pykett "Reading" 22). This New Woman demanded the removal of social, political and economic discrimination based on gender and sought rights and duties on the basis of individual capacity alone. So what did Chopin mean for readers to take away from this New Woman and how would she give meaning for twenty first century women?

The movement went through several years and various waves of feminist theory, with the nineteenth century New Woman being the forerunner, before landing in the twenty first century. According to Catherine Lavendar, author of "The New Woman":

> Feminism in 1910s pursued two interconnected but theoretically antagonistic kinds freedom. New feminists sought the emancipation of woman as a human being and as "sex-being," creature of her special nature. Feminists wanted to have it both ways--to like men and in some respects to be like men, while loyal politically and ideologically to their own sex; and to expand the concept of womanhood while proclaiming the variability of individuals within a sex. Feminism was full of double aims: it joined the concept of women's equality with men to the concept of sexual difference; it joined the aim of individual release of personality with that of concerted social action; it joined the endorsement of what was human to the development of political solidarity among women.

The desire to be like men yet remain independent women, were two interconnected but theoretically antagonistic kinds of freedom is the framework for most feminist thought. The

emergence of the New Woman in the nineteenth century eventually lead to first wave feminism, and would continue until the mid-1900s.

Second wave feminism, coined by Marsha Lear, began in the 1960s. While first wave feminists largely responded to injustices they had themselves experienced, this next wave of feminism grew out of Civil Rights and anti-war movements. This new group of women's liberators situated themselves in the heart of other social issues of that time. In fact, the movement grew out of leftist movements in postwar Western societies, among them the student protests, the anti–Vietnam War movement, the lesbian and gay movements, and, in the United States, the civil rights and Black power movements. These movements criticized "capitalism" and "imperialism" and focused on the notion and interests of "oppressed" groups: the working classes, Blacks, and in principle, also women and homosexuals (Fisher 37). The second wave feminists sought change in the following areas of society: legal inequalities, sexuality, the workplace and, most importantly, reproduction rights or the right to choose. Unlike their calm predecessors, these women sowed their seeds of change through sit-ins, protests, boycotts and some even landed in jail. A stark difference from the nineteenth century New Woman who quietly cut her hair and wore jeans, these new feminists spoke their minds with megaphones. Like the New Woman, however, the changes they sought were just as necessary. In addition to seeking certain equalities, during this time, women began embracing their individual differences among one another. Out of this individuality grew various sects of feminism; black feminism, lesbian feminism, liberal feminism, and social feminism all fighting for various rights. Some theorists believe it was because of the mixed agenda that the movement became disjointed and weakened. Whatever the reasons, second wave feminism gave rise to the third, and most current, wave of feminism.

The third wave was made possible by the greater economic and professional power and status achieved by women of the second wave, the massive expansion in opportunities for the dissemination of ideas created by the information revolution of the late 20th century, and the coming of age of Generation X scholars and activists. According to Jerilyn Fisher, author of *Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender,* Third-wave feminism manifests itself in "girl" rhetoric, which seeks to overcome the theoretical question of equity or difference and the political question of evolution or revolution, while it challenges the notion of "universal woman- hood" and embraces ambiguity and diversity (28). This universal womanhood is the underlying goal of these current feminists. Some critics believe the objectives and goals of second wave feminists are still upon us and that it is too early for a new wave; however, today's generation of women believe there are more issues to add. Those who believe more is necessary were literally daughters of the second wave. Third Wave Direct Action Corporation (organized in 1992) became in 1997 the Third Wave Foundation, dedicated to supporting "groups and individuals working towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice"; both were founded by Rebecca Walker, daughter of novelist and second waver Alice Walker (Lavendar). Like its predecessors, third wave feminism grew out of the successes of second wave feminism and continues to strive towards complete gender equality, both globally and among all races and ethnicities.

In the late nineteenth century, Kate Chopin brought to life in her fiction the New Woman; a liberated woman who thought on her own, wanted individual freedoms, strove to achieve an education and went from solely domesticated to working outside the home. These were all very radical ideas in the 1800s; however, they were the freedoms certain women wanted and fought to achieve. So, what was Chopin's goal with the introduction of such a radical creature?

According to her response to the negative reception of *The Awakening,* it appears that she meant nothing other than a good story; however, based on the intensity of its themes, Chopin meant for Edna to plant a seed of change, which she did. In a sort of retraction she stated:

> Having a group of people at my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had the slightest intimation of such a thing I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late.

The mess that Edna made gave rise to the historical uprising of women in the 1960s when *The Awakening* reemerged as one of the most important pieces of feminist fiction. In essence, that period in her life mirrors the theme in some of her earliest writing. She started out like the animal in "Emancipation," ready to taste and represent life fully. When she finally began to spread her literary wings, she reached higher and higher, only to be petrified into the silent, but proud "White Eagle," the final image she created for the public which was not ready for her (Seyersted "Critical" 200). Since its reemergence, *The Awakening* has been vaulted into the Literary Canon, no easy feat for a female author. Additionally, her short stories and two major novels still continue to appear in the classroom, often times Chopin being taught as a major American female author.

Based on the literature that paved the way for women's rights, the questions still remains: are we, twenty first century women, who they wanted us to become? Did Edna do her job as the nineteenth century New Woman? Going back to hopes of Kate Chopin and her reasoning for Edna Pontellier, the message that she gave to the world was that women deserve a choice, equal

to that of man, about their own destiny. Based on that message of choice, I believe that, over the course of three waves of feminism and women's movements, we are who she wanted us to be: we can choose to be single or be wives, to be mothers and or not, to be domestic goddesses or work outside the home, to have our voices heard, but most importantly, we are allowed to choose. While to some, Edna swimming out to sea was the end, for me it was the beginning of something so much more; aside from her actions planting a seed of change, it is my belief that Edna is still out there swimming, simply waiting for the appropriate time to swim back and give us more of her.

Works Cited

Anderson, Nancy Fix. *Woman Against Women in Victorian England.* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Ardis, Ann L. and Leslie W. Lewis, eds. *Women's Experience of Modernity 1875-1945.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

---. *New Women, New Novels Feminism and Early Modernism.* London: Rutgers University Press, 1990.

Basch, Francoise. *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel.* New York: Schocken Books, 1974.

Beer, Janet., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008

Bloom, Harold., ed. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views.* New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007.

---. *British Women Fiction Writers of the 19th Century.* Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1998.

---. *Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Bloom's Guides.* New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008.

---. "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Bloom's Notes." Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishing, 1999.

Bonner, Thomas, Jr. "The Kate Chopin Companion." New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Burchard, Gina M. "Kate Chopin's Problematical Womanliness: The Frontier of American Feminism." *Journal of the American Studies of Texas* 15 (1984): 35-45. Print.

Calder, Jenni. "Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction." New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Chopin, Kate. "Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie." New York: Penguin Group, 1999.

---. "Emancipation: A Life Fable" undated manuscript, circa 1869-1870

---. "The Awakening" New York: SoHo Books, 1996.

Cooper, James and Sheila M. Cooper. "The Roots of American Feminist Thought." Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973.

Dyer, Joyce. "The Awakening: A Novel of Beginnings." New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993.

Fisher, Jerilyn and Ellen S. Silber., ed. "Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender." Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003.

Grand, Sarah, Olive Schreiner and Mona Caird. "New Woman Strategies." New York: Manchester Press, 2004.

Heilmann, Ann. "New Woman Fiction." Great Britain: Anthony Rowe Ltd, 2000.

---. "New Woman Strategies." New York: Manchester Press, 2004.

Kinnison, Dana. "Female Resistance to Gender Conformity in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*." Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003.

Lavendar, Catherine. "The New Woman." College of Staten Island. 2010. Web. 14 June 2011.

Ledger, Sally. "The New Woman Fiction and the Feminism at the *fin de siècle*." New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

Malin, Jo and Victoria Boynton., ed. "Herspace: Women, Writing, and Solitude." New York: The Haworth Press, 2002.

Martin, Wendy. "New Essays on The Awakening." New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Petry, Alice Hall., ed. "Critical Essays on Kate Chopin." New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996.

Pykett, Lyn. "The 'Improper' Feminine." New York: Routledge, 1992.

---,ed. "Reading *FIN DE SIECLE* Fictions." New York: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1996.

Richardson, Angelique and Chris Willis, eds. "The New Woman In Fiction and In Fact: *Fin-de-Siecle* Feminisms." New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Ringe, Donald A. "Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening." American Literature. Ed. na. Duke University Press, 1972. 580-588.

Rubinstein, Geoffrey. "Printing History and Development." Web. 26 May 2011.

Seyersted, Per. "Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography." Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.

Schaffer, Talia. "Nothing but Foolscap and Ink: Inventing the New Woman." The New Woman In Fiction and In Fact: *Fin-de-Siecle* Feminisms. Ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 39-52.

Schreiner, Olive. "Life's Gifts." 1892. Poem.

Showalter, Elaine. "Tradition and the Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book." From *New Essays on The Awakening*, Wendy Martin, ed., pp. 33-57. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Sledziewski, Elizabeth G. "The French Revolution as the Turning Point." A History of Women, vol. IV. Cambridge: Belkamp, 1993.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. The Pearl of Orr's Island. Readaclassic.com, 2010. Print.

Sutton-Ramspeck, Beth. "Raising the Dust." Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004.

"The Awakening" [From "Recent Novels"] The Nation Aug. 1899: 96.

Toth, Emily. "Regionalism and the Female Imagination." New York: Human Science Press, Inc., 1985.

---. "A Writer, Her Reviews, and Her Markets." *Unveiling Kate Chopin.* Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

---. "The Independent Woman and 'Free' Love." *The Massachusetts Review* 16.4 (1975): 647-664. Print.

---. "Unveiling Kate Chopin." Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

Toth, Emily and Per Seyersted., eds. "Kate Chopin's Private Papers." Indiana: Indiana

University Press, 1998.

Walker, Nancy. "Kate Copin: A Literary Life." New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Weissman, Judith. "Half Savage and Hardly and Free: Women and Rural Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century." Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.

Wheeler, Marjorie Spruill, ed. "One Woman, One Vote." US: New Sage Press, 1995.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women.* 1792. Web. 10 February 2011.

Zlotnick, Jane. "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood." *The Markham Review* 3 (1968): 1-5. Print.

Annotated Bibliography

Anderson, Nancy Fix. *Woman Against Women in Victorian England.* Indianapolis:

Indiana University Press, 1987.

"Woman Against Women in Victorian England" is a thoroughly researched, persuasively argued, and imaginatively constructed study that expands our understanding of the complex history of women's roles in Victorian England. I used this text in chapter one of my paper in order to provide an in depth look at women during the nineteenth century.

Ardis, Ann L. and Leslie W. Lewis, eds. *Women's Experience of Modernity 1875-*

1945. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

By insisting that women's experience defines modernity, and by traversing modernist and literary boundaries, the contributors to this volume both recover lost cultural resources and pursue fresh lines of feminist thinking. The essays reach back to Victorian pretexts to modernity, into imperial sites, and through a rich variety of commercial and public discourses. I used this author twice throughout my paper in order to support the feminist critical response to Kate Chopin.

---. *New Women, New Novels Feminism and Early Modernism.* London: Rutgers

University Press, 1990.

Ann Ardis delves deep into the anti-feminist life of the slowly emerging nineteenth century New Woman when she says, "She was called 'Novissima': the New Woman, the Odd Woman, the Wild Woman, and the Superfluous Woman in English novels and periodicals of the 1880s and 1890s. A tremendous amount of polemic was wielded against her for choosing not to pursue the conventional bourgeois woman's career of marriage and motherhood. Indeed, for her transgressions against the sex, gender, and class distinctions of Victorian England, she was accused of instigating the second fall of man" (Intro). Ardis' contribution to feminist thought is crucial in order to fully understand the New Woman and her history.

Basch, Francoise. *Relative Creatures: Victorian Women in Society and the Novel.* New

York: Schocken Books, 1974.

Francoise Basch provides the reader with a very detailed look at Victorian society during and throughout 1875-1900. The text chronicles the social and historical realities of that time. It was used throughout my research and as a guide for that time period.

Beer, Janet., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin.* New York: Cambridge

University Press, 2008.

"The Cambridge Companion" situates *The Awakening* in its historical and social context, highlights major thematic strains in the novel, and aids negotiation of the wide-ranging theoretical debates surrounding Chopin work. The bringing together of documents from Chopin's period of the novel's composition, a selection of modern critical work and key passages annotated to illustrate their significance serves to enrich readership's understanding of the text. In Beer's section of the companion, she highlights the time period in which Chopin wrote and how she developed and wrote her characters to reflect the nineteenth century's New Woman. It would be impossible to write a paper on the history of Chopin and *The Awakening* without including Beer throughout.

Bloom, Harold., ed. *Bloom's Modern Critical Views*. New York: Infobase Publishing,

2007.

Bloom's "Modern Critical Views" gives the reader just that, modern critical views of Kate Chopin's life and works. He outlines the historical context in which Chopin was raised and wrote. The history that he provides of the early Victorian era was an important source throughout my paper, in that it is not general knowledge and is deserving of a credible source. This particular text outlines other authors writing during the nineteenth century as well.

---. *British Women Fiction Writers of the 19th Century.* Philadelphia: Chelsea House

Publishers, 1998.

Two thirds of the excerpted critical analyses have been regurgitated from previous works edited by Harold Bloom. In fact, a number of the excerpts have been taken from essays previously excerpted in The Critical Perspective. This volume follows the same format as others in the series: a brief biography of the author followed by critical excerpts and ending with a bibliography of her works. He does a decent job outlining Kate Chopin; however, with Harold Bloom it is possible to gather most of the research necessary from one or two of his compilations of essays. This was used to reinforce my research.

---. *Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Bloom's Guides*. New York: Infobase Publishing,

2008.

According to Harold Bloom, Kate Chopin's The Awakening is a favorite of feminist critics, who see it as a forerunner of Liberation. His text gathers together numerous critical essays on the novel. Topics discussed include the symbolic use of the sea, literary naturalism, and even Charles Darwin's theory in regards to the novel. Again with Harold

Bloom, I used his text as reinforcement to already established research. I think when studying Kate Chopin, Harold Bloom is a must.

---. *Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Bloom's Notes.* Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishing, 1999.

Harold Bloom's "Notes" on Kate Chopin includes essays written by various literary critics who provide overviews and in depth analyses of Chopin's life, literary struggles and successes and death. I will use Bloom throughout my paper to support assumptions and conclusions I have regarding Chopin's life and works.

Bonner, Thomas, Jr. *The Kate Chopin Companion.* New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Thomas Bonner's Kate Chopin companion was referenced throughout most of my research. Bonner does an excellent job of providing the reader with an in depth look at Kate Chopin's life and works. He makes numerous references to the parallels seen in Chopin's real life with the fictional life of Edna Pontellier. Because I kept coming across his research, I felt it necessary to include in mine.

Burchard, Gina M. *Kate Chopin's Problematical Womanliness: The Frontier of American Feminism.* Journal of the American Studies of Texas 15 (1984): 35 45. Print.

Gina Burchard's essay begins by noting how "Kate Chopin certainly would not have called herself a feminist," and goes on to provide the reader with an anti-feminist perspective (35). She believes that Chopin treated human relationships in a generalized way and that she drastically undermines any incipient feminist sentiments throughout. I used this source as an example of an author who felt Chopin was anti-feminist.

Calder, Jenni. *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

This was a useful book when researching the Victorian era and women's roles and expectations during that time. Jenni Calder does a successful job of providing the history of women and the women's movement during the nineteenth century. I used this text as a source throughout chapter 1 when I was providing a history of women during Kate Chopin's lifetime.

Chopin, Kate. *Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie.* New York: Penguin Group, 1999.

In the decade prior to the publication of her landmark novel, *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin wrote about ninety short stories. She gathered twenty-three of them in a collection entitled *Bayou Folk* in 1894, and followed three years later with a collection of twenty-one more in *A Night in Acadie*. Together, these nuanced portraits of nineteenth-century inhabitants of New Orleans and Natchitoches Parish exquisitely form a sort of Southern novel of manners. Chopin was deeply influenced by the work of French and American realists. I included other works by Kate Chopin into my research. It was important to show her development as an author as well as her, often unintentional, involvement in the women's movement.

---. "Emancipation: A Life Fable" undated manuscript, circa 1869-1870

Emancipation is used is chapter 2. While the creature in Kate Chopin's story, "Emancipation: A Life Fable," is male, the experiences described anticipate those of many of Chopin's female characters throughout her life's work. This story carries the theme, which resonates throughout Chopin's novels, of self-definition. This theme of self-defining originates in her earliest writing, her commonplace book, when she was just a young girl in the late 1800s.

---. *The Awakening*. New York: SoHo Books, 1996.

This was my primary source. I based my research on this famous fictional piece by Kate Chopin. My thesis is run using this novel as the foundation and guide.

Cooper, James and Sheila M. Cooper. *The Roots of American Feminist Thought*.

Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973.

Feminist theory was crucial in my research. In order to show the movement from the nineteenth century New Woman to today's feminist, I expanded my research to include various feminist critics. According to James Cooper, "Yet despite the very real problems that come with categorizing thinkers as "x" or "y" or "z," feminist thought is old enough to have a history complete with its own set of labels: "liberal," "radical (libertarian or cultural)," "Marxist-socialist," "Psychoanalytic," "existentialist," "postmodern," "multicultural and global," and "ecological." No doubt feminist thought will eventually shed these labels for others that better express its intellectual and political commitments to women. For now, however, feminist thought's old labels remain useful. They signal to the broader public that feminism is not a monolithic ideology, that all feminists do not think alike, and that, like all other time-honored modes of thinking, feminist thought has a past as well as a present and a future" (Intro). This text helped me with my struggle to carry on appropriate labels and redefine terms when necessary.

Dyer, Joyce. *The Awakening: A Novel of Beginnings*. New York: Twayne Publishers,

1993.

Joyce Dyer's essay speaks to the early reception of *The Awakening*. She provides a unique perspective on early twentieth century literary critics. Her essay is written through a feminist lens and focuses primarily on the social and political constraints of women as authors and beings.

Fisher, Jerilyn and Ellen S. Silber., ed. *Women in Literature: Reading through the Lens of Gender*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003.

"Feminist criticism is a moral as well as a political enterprise: "it takes a stand" (Donovan ix). Thus, it has the capacity to alter the way that readers understand themselves and conceptualize their surroundings. Reading through a feminist lens that examines gender, students may find their assumptions about women and men disrupted as they learn about power, privilege, authority, point of view, and 'otherness'" (Intro). This text was helpful in helping me to define feminist criticism and read parts of *The Awakening* through that lens. It also helped me develop a better idea of what feminism is today, as opposed to the nineteenth century.

Grand, Sarah, Olive Schreiner and Mona Caird. *New Woman Strategies*. New York: Manchester Press, 2004.

The 1880s and 90s saw a rise in feminist literature, and with any rise comes the naysayer. One example of an outspoken opposition to the movement was Sarah Grand. Initially, she was a forerunner in the movement against the wild-woman and a strong proponent for the domestic woman. Grand connected the maternal, domestic and spiritual responsibility of women to fiction. While her ideology varies from time-to-time throughout her life, I think it is crucial to know that she was in the "negative reception" camp for *The Awakening*. This speaks volumes about where she came from and where she went. She was a political activist who played it safe in keeping the liberated woman in the kitchen. I used her text, response and criticism as a base for the negative reception of Kate Chopin, the author. Although her activism shifted throughout her life, her initial response is noteworthy.

Heilmann, Ann. *New Woman Fiction*. Great Britain: Anthony Rowe Ltd, 2000.

The symbol of the shifting categories of gender and sexuality, the New Woman epitomized the spirit of the fin-de-siècle. This text offers an interdisciplinary approach to the growing field of New Woman studies by exploring the relationship between the first-wave feminist literature, the 19th-century women's movement and female consumer culture. The book places the debate about femininity, feminism, and fiction in its cultural and socio-historical context exploring New Woman fiction as a genre, whose emerging

theoretical discourse prefigured concepts central to second-wave feminist theory. It is impossible to study modern feminist literature without coming across Professor Ann Heilmann. Her contribution to the study of the New Woman as seen in Kate Chopin's fiction is vital to the overall understanding of first wave feminism. I used Heilmann as a source throughout the full length of my research and essay.

---. *New Woman Strategies*. New York: Manchester Press, 2004.

Recent years have seen a renaissance of scholarly interest in the fin-de-siécle fiction of the New Woman. *New Woman Strategies* offers a new approach to the subject by focusing on the discursive strategies and revisionist aesthetics of the genre in the writings of three of its key exponents: Sarah Grand (1854-1943), Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) and Mona Caird (1854-1932). The study explores how each writer drew on, mimicked, feminized and ultimately transformed traditional literary and cultural tropes and paradigms: feminity, allegory and mythology. From this text I focused, mainly, on Sarah Grand's contribution to the first wave feminist movement.

Kinnison, Dana. *Female Resistance to Gender Conformity in Kate Chopin's The Awakening*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003.

Dana Kinnison's essay focuses on the turn-of-the-century world of Kate Chopin. She uses the gender images that have come to be to show the novels sociohistorical purpose. She traces the story of Edna Pontellier's struggle against strict conformity and juxtaposes two characters alongside Edna to illustrate the few and fixed opportunities available to her.

Lavendar, Catherine. "The New Woman." College of Staten Island. 2010. Web. 14 June 2011.

This professor's web page centers on the New Woman. I used it as a reliable reference point for statistics and facts.

Ledger, Sally. *The New Woman Fiction and the Feminism at the fin de siècle*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

The New Woman was a *fin de siècle* phenomenon. This text covered the social realities of the 1890s for women. Feminists of today have created various waves of women's movements. The New Woman is an enduring cultural icon. The information drawn from this text was used throughout my essay in order to provide a better understanding of the feminist movement overall.

Malin, Jo and Victoria Boynton., ed. *Herspace: Women, Writing, and Solitude*. New

York: The Haworth Press, 2002.

In 1929, Virginia Woolf wrote that a woman must have her own money and a room of her own. The point of a woman having her own space was in terms of writing; however, many would argue that what was really meant was that it applied to life in general. She knew that when a woman was not granted her own space, literary silence, despair and madness were often times the result. Predating Woolf was Susan B. Anthony whose aim was to move from women subjugated by their husbands to partnership and equality. This text allowed me to frame the time period around women and provide an accurate description of society during the nineteenth century.

Martin, Wendy. *New Essays on The Awakening.* New York: Cambridge University

Press, 1988.

Wendy Martin's collection of essays highlights the nineteenth century, pre and post-Civil War literature. It provides the reader with an overview of Kate Chopin's literary and personal evolution.

Petry, Alice Hall., ed. *Critical Essays on Kate Chopin.* New York: G.K. Hall & Co.,

1996.

Alice Petry's essay is written through a feminist perspective. She follows the movement of *The Awakening* from its debut to its disappearance, and finally, to its reemergence. She flattens critics who state that the text centered on the sexual confusion and urges of a confused woman. Her perspective is valuable in that she both highlights the critics and provides a fresh standpoint.

Pykett, Lyn. *The 'Improper' Feminine*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Lyn Pykett is seen throughout my thesis. I cite her quite a few times. Her information was appropriate when covering the "improper feminine" or incorrect ways in which women behaved. In the cacophony of nineteenth-century voices, both male and female, which vied with each other to speak for or about woman or women, the novel stands out as perhaps the most influential and widely disseminated medium in which women spoke on their own behalf (22).

---,ed. *Reading FIN DE SIECLE Fictions*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman

Limited, 1996.

In its simplest definition, "fin de siècle" refers to the end of a century, yet at the end of the 19th century in Britain, the term did not just refer to a set of dates, but rather a whole

set of artistic, moral, and social concerns. To describe something as a fin de siècle phenomenon invokes a sense of the old order ending and new, radical departures. The adoption of the French term, rather than the use of the English "end of the century," helps to trace this particular critical content: it was, and continues to be, associated with those writers and artists whose work displayed a debt to French decadent, symbolist, or naturalist writers and artists. I used this as a reference point for the ever-changing times of the nineteenth century.

Richardson, Angelique and Chris Willis, eds. *The New Woman In Fiction and In Fact: Fin-de-Siecle Feminisms*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Richardson and Willis move through their text providing examples and historical information specifically about where the New Woman came from and where she was headed. The New Woman did not appear from nowhere. During the course of the nineteenth century women had increasingly challenged their subordinate social and political position. They had a radical inheritance from the pioneering feminist Mary Wollstonecraft whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), had condemned the sexual double standard and urged women's right to education, employment and full citizenship (1). Early and mid-Victorian ideas on progress passion, morality, femininity, domesticity, development and evolution are replayed and reworked by New Women in the last decades of the century (3). I used this text throughout in order to show where the New Woman came from, her journey along the way and where she ended up.

Ringe, Donald A. *Romantic Imagery in Kate Chopin's The Awakening*. American Literature. ed. na. Duke University Press, 1972. 580-588.

Doanld Ringe's essay centers on the romantic imagery in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Because he feels that critics of Chopin have tended to construe her theme much too narrowly, such as a novel of sexual freedom or female self-assertion, he deemed it necessary to comment on the novels imagery. He highlights the symbolism and imagery and notes their significance to the story of Edna's rebirth.

Rubinstein, Geoffrey. "Printing History and Development." Web. 26 May 2011.

This website was a primary source for printing history and facts pertaining to nineteenth century women writers.

Seyersted, Per. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.

An essay with Kate Chopin in it would be incomplete without the mention of Per

Seyersted. His influence on the reemergence of Kate Chopin was crucial. In the present book, Mr. Seyersted carries out an extensive re-examination of both the life and work of the author, basing it on her total oeuvre. Much new Kate Chopin material, such as previously unknown stories, letters, and a diary, has recently come to light. We can now see that she was a much more ambitious and purposeful writer than we have hitherto known. From the beginning, her special theme was female self-assertion. As each new success increased her self-confidence, she grew more and more daring in her descriptions of emancipated woman who wants to dictate her own life. Mr. Seyersted traces the author's growth as an artist and as a penetrating interpreter of the female condition, and shows how her career culminated in *The Awakening* and the unknown story 'The Storm.' With these works, which were decades ahead of their time, Kate Chopin takes her place among the important American realist writers of the 1890's.

Schaffer, Talia. *Nothing but Foolscap and Ink: Inventing the New Woman. The New Woman In Fiction and In Fact: Fin-de-Siecle Feminisms.* Ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 39-52.

Richardson and Willis edited this text; two authors I use throughout my thesis. "Nothing but Foolscap and Ink: Inventing the New Woman": Working as clerks, typists, teachers, college students, journalists, or perhaps even shopgirls, they lived in spartan flats, struggling to earn money for genteel gowns and living primarily on bread and tea. They walked without chaperones, carried their own latchkeys, bicycled, and the more daring ones smoked cigarettes, cut their hair, or wore divided skirts and plain costumes in accordance with the principles of rational dress. These women rarely described themselves as 'New Women'. For when people spoke about the 'New Woman' in the 1890's, they were usually referring to a very different figure: the unsexed, terrifying, violent Amazon ready to overturn the world. The 'New Woman' was a comic fictional figure composed of *Punch* cartoons, much vilified novels, and ominous warnings in popular magazines (39). Aside from the general abuse women had to endure because of the subjugation from their husbands, women were made the fool any time they attempted to step outside their expected role as wife and mother. "Nothing but..." sums up the jokes women were made into. This was an excellent resource for providing information on how the New Woman was received. It spins a negative twist to a positive movement, but I felt it was necessary to provide the reader with multiple perspectives.

Schreiner, Olive. "Life's Gifts." 1892. Poem.

Written, "To a small girl-child, who may live to grasp somewhat of that which for us is yet sight, not touch (Schreiner). Shreiner captures the dilemma of the woman who seeks

to be independent, to define herself, in nineteenth and early-twentieth century fiction. If the heroine chooses Love, she loses her independence, her freedom to make any more choices for romance, marriage, and motherhood confine her to their sphere. If she chooses independence (Freedom), too often she must renounce Love, especially its sexual aspect. A third solution is hardly more attractive: a compromise marriage with a man who, because he is dull or maimed or both, places fewer restrictions on his wife. This poem is significant in that it exemplifies and illuminates some of the life altering decisions women had to make during the nineteenth century, often between themselves and their family.

Showalter, Elaine. "Tradition and the Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book." From *New Essays on The Awakening*, Wendy Martin, ed., pp. 33-57. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

Elaine Showalter moves through the pre-Civil War time period of the antebellum writers. Her essay focuses on late nineteenth century Realism and local colorists, including Kate Chopin. She gives a brief history of Chopin and includes her assertions and comparisons between Chopin and Edna Pontellier. Her essay moves through the time period in which Chopin wrote *The Awakening,* all the while comparing the two people.

Sledziewski, Elizabeth G. "The French Revolution as the Turning Point." A History of Women, vol. IV. Cambridge: Belkamp, 1993.

I referenced Sledziewski when discussing, in detail, the Enlightenment period and the French Revolution. Using Sledziewski as a source was crucial when describing the impact this period in time had on women's rights.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. The Pearl of Orr's Island. Readaclassic.com, 2010. Print.

I used a short dialogue at the beginning of chapter 2 to introduce the unbalanced lives of men and women. For my purpose it stood as irony. The conversation is as follows: "Are there any lives of women?" "No, my dear," said Mr. Sewell; "in old times, women did not get their lives written, though I don't doubt many of them were much better worth writing than the men's."

Sutton-Ramspeck, Beth. *Raising the Dust*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004.

Raising the Dust identifies a heretofore-overlooked literary phenomenon that author Beth Sutton-Ramspeck calls "literary housekeeping." The three writers she examines rejected turn-of-the-century aestheticism and modernism in favor of a literature that is practical,

even ostensibly mundane, designed to "set the human household in order." To Mary Augusta Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, housekeeping represented public responsibilities: making the food supply safe, reforming politics, and improving the human race itself. *Raising the Dust* places their writing in the context of the late-Victorian era, in particular the eugenics movement, the proliferation of household conveniences, the home economics movement, and decreased reliance on servants. These changes affected relationships between the domestic sphere and the public sphere, and hence shaped the portrayal of domesticity in the era's fiction and nonfiction.

"The Awakening" [From "Recent Novels"] The Nation Aug. 1899: 96.

This is one of the original reviews of *The Awakening*. It begins with describing the story as "the sad story of a Southern lady who wanted to do what she wanted to. From wanting to, she did, with disastrous consequences; but as she swims out to the sea in the end, it is to be hoped that her example may lie for ever undredged." This review is hugely significant and encapsulates the time period in which *The Awakening* was written and reviewed.

Toth, Emily. *Regionalism and the Female Imagination.* New York: Human Science

Press, Inc., 1985.

"Regionalism and the Female Imagination" was used as the foundation for gaining a deeper understanding of regionalism and the female imagination. Emily Toth understands the history of women authors during the nineteenth century, specifically Kate Chopin.

---. "A Writer, Her Reviews, and Her Markets." *Unveiling Kate Chopin.* Mississippi:

University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

Emily Toth writes that "...while Chopin might have hesitated to call herself 'great' in public, she soon discovered a fact that is a great disappointment to all authors: Their reviewers do not understand the" (145). In her essay and books, Toth makes it her goal to discredit the negative reviews and reception of Chopin's work and highlight the positive. I use Toth throughout my paper in order to support my assertions about Kate Chopin and *The Awakening*. She also gives a more modern description of the New Woman and feminism, which I use throughout my paper.

---. "The Independent Woman and 'Free' Love." *The Massachusetts Review* 16.4

(1975): 647-664. Print.

It would be impossible to cover the life and times of Kate Chopin without making note of the many works written about her by Emily Toth. This is a review of *The Awakening*

dating back to 1975. While it is not the original news report, they are the original words. "Women, no matter their personal psychological independence, will suffer from pervasive judgment by caste, i.e., their society judges them by the standards of womanhood --- appearance, wifely and maternal qualities --- regardless of their own aims. Moreover, economic independence is virtually impossible. "Liberation" and the choice of Freedom are, at best, partial --- and one dimension is almost invariably missing: Sex, the difference between renunciation and tragedy for the unmarried woman" (651). I use Toth throughout my thesis and would not have been able to accurately describe the world in which Kate Chopin lived without her words.

---. *Unveiling Kate Chopin*. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.

In *Unveiling Kate Chopin* Emily Toth, the foremost authority on Chopin's life and works, creates a sharply revealing portrait of a modern woman in a Victorian world. Born in St. Louis in 1850, Kate O'Flaherty was raised by wealthy, feisty widows and educated by brilliant nuns. She endured a mysterious "outrage" committed against her by Union soldiers in her teens and suffered what moderns now call a "loss of voice." But she survived to become a lively, dangerously clever social observer. She had the talent and then the life experiences to become a writer. Her Louisiana-born husband, Oscar Chopin, had grown up in France and did not restrict her. In New Orleans (where she gossiped with the painter Edgar Degas) and then in rural Louisiana (where the neighbors hated her), Kate produced six children in nine years. Yet she retained her individuality and her wicked sense of humor. After her husband's sudden death, Kate's affair with another woman's husband was a village scandal--but following the lessons of the French women who raised her, she knew when to leave.

Toth, Emily and Per Seyersted., eds. *Kate Chopin's Private Papers*. Indiana: Indiana

University Press, 1998.

It is an unusual resource, which transcribes everything from the ten-year-old Kate's "Leaves of Affection" notebook, to the adult Chopin's "Manuscript Account Books," to the sheet music for her "Lilia" polka, to fragments of short stories rescued from a warehouse in Worcester, Massachusetts. In other words, this book is something of a crazy quilt; but Toth and Seyersted have done their best to impose order upon the disparate pieces, usually with good results. One source of order is organization. The editors have divided Chopin's life into three sections: 1850-70, 1871-84, and 1885-1904.

Walker, Nancy. *Kate Copin: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

This text provides excellent examples of nineteenth century women responding to women in literature. It explains in great detail the literary expectations of women during the

nineteenth century and outlines the evolution to literary freedom. Walker also provides the literary critic perspective from the 1950s. She highlights the reception of *The Awakening*, both positive and negative.

Weissman, Judith. *Half Savage and Hardly and Free: Women and Rural Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century.* Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.

Weissman provides a new and possibly important feminist viewpoint, and although rural networks of support among women may not be easily reestablished, women might do well to look to rural communities as real alternatives to the stresses of city living. How modern women can return to a rural community and establish financial and spiritual independence... cannot be answered in...a study of the nineteenth-century novel. Nor should it be. It is enough that Weissman has sown the seed.'

Wheeler, Marjorie Spruill, ed. *One Woman, One Vote*. US: NewSage Press, 1995.

The 70-year battle for women's suffrage is the subject of this gripping text. One Woman, One Vote documents the struggles both of the leaders and the women who fought along side them. From Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Alice Paul, this film follows the fight for equal rights. Though the U.S. called itself the world's greatest democracy, more than half of its citizens were denied the right to vote. And yet the struggle for equal suffrage split the movement apart, pitting those who were more militant in their approach against women with more conventional strategies of education and lobbying.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women.* 1792. Web. 10 February 2011.

I drew quotes from Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication...* in order to support the suffrage movement and rights of women of the nineteenth century. Without her vindication, it might have taken years before women began to question their domestic state. Wollstonecraft is quoted throughout.

Zlotnick, Jane. "A Woman's Will: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood." *The Markham Review* 3 (1968): 1-5. Print.

This is one of the original reviews upon the reemergence of *The Awakening* in the 1960s. It is an article that highlights the novels original reception and seeks to define and redefine, based on the time period, some of the terminology used throughout the text. It connects some of the symbols and imagery to the story in a way that many reviews neglected to achieve. I will use this in my paper as a reference for reviews that were made public during the reemergence of *The Awakening.*